

THE
BOARDING
-
JOHN OWEN



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THE HOARDING

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

THE HOARDING

BY

JOHN OWEN

AUTHOR OF "ROBERT GREGORY," ETC.



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E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY
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TO
MY FRIEND
Arthur Churchman

THE HOARDING

THE HOARDING

CHAPTER I

BECAUSE I once told the story of a man in the cotton trade there has been thrust upon me a tale of a very different sort, yet with a background of commercialism. The man who told me the story knew, I think, two, if not three, of the chief people in it, and knew them fairly well. “Advertising,” said this friend of mine once when in Weftport, “advertising, Elmslie, is now a—‘profession.’ It’s their own word, the men who run it. And when you get something deeply enough established to give it a sort of right to call itself by that style (pretentious, perhaps?), you are likely to discover that many things are becoming involved—deep things even of the heart. Every human business is bound to be charged, whether in its remoter or more obvious passages, with the stuff of human passions (a piece of cloth in a window—well, the physical seeming of some immortal made it, perhaps suffered to make it).”

And this so-called “profession” must now be supposed to have its human, even its spiritual, side—and its stories.

Well, here is the story as it was handed to me.

I have only this to add. I don't accept responsibility for anything, and I am not writing to endorse the methods of a man who, for instance, found that the practice of his profession admitted of the use of the genius of one of the first of English painters.

And yet I suppose he would argue that twenty years of perfect art on the walls would reshape our psychology. However, what matter my view? This is his story, not mine.—R. ELMSLIE.

.

The story seems properly to begin with the record of one Higgs, "ex-service man," and at this fateful hour in charge of a lift in Imperial Buildings, E.C.—a small man with red peppery eyes. He stands out a sort of human absurdity, a grotesque, a mere figure of fun whose contribution, taken as we have to take it, is not at all in part with what follows. A man of an infinite stupidity, his story has to be reconstructed—and in terms other than his own.

He wasn't without his philosophy. "Them as is et the top, they're et the bottom. It's es they begin to go up that they comes dahn. A floor at a time. And them es is et the top, you'll find on the grahnd floor."

The wars in which he had taken a part understood to be distinguished, were securely hidden in the dark recesses of the Past. "Ex-service" has no reference to our last war; but the criticism of the controlling powers was not very different from what it has come

to be in these times. To the mind of Higgs these powers were presented as intriguing, oppressive, and obscurely in league with Circumstance and Environment for his own undoing.

“They likes to dahn yer. When I ’es to turn to on me own I starts a fish and chips. I calls it the ‘Imperial Fish and Chips.’ Did anybody ’elp me—try to ’elp? Naw! The public, es yer call it, went to a long-nosed feller in the next street wot also ’ed a fish and chips—a sheeny, a dirty sheeny. There weren’t no encouragement for what they call enterprise. Nen! I always thought I’d like to ’ev a little business—puppy fancyin’, costering, or them there fish and chips. And there’s naw chawnce for nobody nahdays. Nen! Threrawing money away.”

He’d talk like that of blighted ambitions. Perhaps it was an ironical direction of Fate that this very man should be witness—first, most relevant witness—to the rise of another ambition lifting itself from a foundation little less obscure than his own. For one morning brought into the handsome marble hall of that A section of Imperial Buildings in which Mr. Higgs stood, the figure of a young man. He was a tallish young man, overgrown, “weedy,” with a figure which had not yet taken shape, the shoulders being too close together—an effect accentuated by the badly fitting new clothes.

He had a long face and lanky black hair brushed back from the ears, clear grey eyes under black and rather remarkably arched eyebrows, a big, generous mouth, and good teeth. But the whole gesture of the

man was that of youth—so much so, indeed, that it no sooner caught the observation of Mr. Higgs than it set up suspicions.

“Naw, yer don’t,” Mr. Higgs announced at once, seeing that the figure bore towards him. “Orfice boys can use the stairs.”

Since the incident came to possess the tragic significance of history, it is perhaps worth mentioning that even as the words left his lips Higgs had a premonition: he said so afterwards, and not so long afterwards.

“I beg your pardon.” The words, spoken slowly, even idly, had an inflexion of curiosity.

“I said,” repeated Higgs rather shrilly, and he did not easily run to shrillness, “that a norffice boy—”

“Meaning me?”

Higgs became aware of two grey eyes that concentrated upon him with a force that he found disconcerting.

“Meanin’ you,” answered Higgs.

“I don’t think you mean me,” said the young man rather gently.

“But I do mean you. A norffice boy like you—”

“Yes, *like* me, but not me. I don’t think I’d mean me if I were you.”

Confused by this dialectical thrust, Mr. Higgs still struggled to maintain his original place in the situation. He stood still now, arms akimbo, slightly swelling his cheeks, trying to discover with what kind of creature he had to do. He was like a bull in that

sunny corner of Europe where it is accounted no more cruel to torment furious cattle in a ring than to worry timid stags with hounds. There stood Mr. Higgs, the bull, with the first dart in its shoulder, puffily taking stock of the position, meditating a charge, but uncertain and suspicious.

“Mean you. Why shouldn’t I mean you?” he got out at last.

“Because,” said the youth still gently, “it mightn’t be a very good thing—for you. You see, you’re, after all, the servant of the tenants.” His blandness had become something in the nature of a miracle to the perturbed Higgs.

There he stood, that boy, to the dull eye of Higgs still a boy in his teens—with only those curiously deep, observant eyes, and a jaw oddly firm and developed for one of his years, to give character or dignity to his appearance. It wasn’t sense nohow, the confused mind of Higgs was telling himself, that this ’ere feller should be standing there talking to *’im*; and still this intolerable phenomenon of youth, rampant, copious, redundant, unconquerable, pervasive, stood there, a portent, a calamity pendulous; and still he went on speaking.

“You are paid so much a week—I don’t know how much—not a great deal, but then probably you don’t deserve a great deal.”

“’Ere—nen o’thet; and es to what I deserve, let me learn you, me lad, I’ve served me country. If it wasn’t for the likes of me, the likes of you would be—would be——”

“Oh, no we wouldn’t!” put in the youth calmly. “That’s hot air—pure hot air. Where are your medals, by the way?—or perhaps they forgot to give ‘em to you. No!” with quiet assurance, “I thought not.” For Mr. Higgs was puffing in silent fury; he was now nearly helpless. There were lots of things he would like to have done, but more than anything else he would have liked to discover why he did none of the things he wanted to do—throw the boy out, throttle him, even turn about and leave him where he stood. But words, if not the words he precisely wanted, seemed to come through his lips at last.

“Medals. Medals, think I wear my medals——”

“No. Quite straight, I don’t. But, look here——” the manner of the youth had changed suddenly—the tone was firmer, less gentle—“I didn’t come here to talk all day about your medals that don’t exist; you remember your manners when you’re addressing a tenant!”

“Tenant!” screamed Higgs in a wonderful crescendo in which alarm and confusion mingled with fury. “Tenant!” He really thought he’d got a point at last. “*You’re* not a tenant!”

“At the moment—no. But,” continued this astonishing and imperturbable young man, “it is really largely your fault that I’m not. You’re keeping me back. I’m not a tenant at this moment; but I shall be one by to-morrow.”

“You!” If Mr. Higgs had meant the monosyllable to express contempt he had failed of his intention. The thing was more like helpless terror than any-

thing else. Of course, what this norffice boy said was all me eye; but the faice of 'im and what an idea: 'e was glad it *was* me eye because to 'ave 'im about *every* day when ten minutes of 'im had nearly been too much—well, it didn't bear thinking about.

But it seemed that the obscure and hideous purpose which this strange youth had professed was *not* a mere profession.

“You seem to doubt me. I suppose you can't understand anybody wanting to live in the same building as yourself. And there I am with you. You really show your intelligence in that——”

“Not so much abaht it! I never said nothing of the kind. I——”

“Oh, don't be modest, and, if I may say it, don't talk so much! And look here, Henderson——”

“My nime isn't 'Enderson,” Mr. Higgs began to declare wildly. It might have been supposed that he had been given the name of some notorious contemporary homicidal maniac by his revulsion from it. “My name's 'Iggs, and you'd better know it.”

“I didn't call you 'Enderson; that's the first point. I don't think much of 'Iggs as a name; that's the second point. The third point is where is the caretaker who has the letting of the offices? I've got an order to view No. 47 top floor back.”

“Why didn't yer sye so before?” said Mr. Higgs sulkily. The impossible seemed to be true: this 'ere lad—don't look as if 'e 'ad 'is first shave yet—was after an orffice; and now, suddenly, a new idea occurred and his manner visibly changed—became

steadier, more amiable. For if, later, he could impose the idea on the secretary of the company owning the building that *he'd* found the tenant there'd be a small fee for him.

“You dawn’t need to werry about thet there caretaker. 'E’s out, as a matter of fact. *I* ken get the key outer the desk yonder and ren you up in a minute —sir.”

The last came unwillingly, but he was now out to conciliate.

“Very well. Move, man, move.”

Mr. Higgs suddenly became the functionary—stepped into his lift, made a dramatic movement in the cage in order by the motion alone to welcome the new tenant within, and at the same time to offer him a service both devoted and lifelong, and when the youth had entered, with a gesture that was histrionically distinguished, pulled the lever which set the lift in motion.

“You mustn’t expect a big orfice,” he began at once, to discount any objections which might later be raised. “It ain’t a big orfice; but there’s been some nice fortunes been begun in it, I’m told, though I can’t swear not ’eveng been ’ere that many years, along of being ex-service and then trying fish an’ chips. But the last gentleman e’s down on the first floor already, and ’e’ll be arfter the ground floor before long if ’e goes on doin’ as well as ’e’s doin’ now.”

“What’s his line?” asked the youth suddenly. It

might have occurred to an observer that in the gesture which went with that inquiry now there was something that you might have called spring, pounce; you might, indeed, have got the idea that the young man saw something that he wanted.

“ ‘Is line is pills,’ ” answered Mr. Higgs. “ ‘E’s Peter’s Pills for the Pulse. That’s ‘oo ‘e is.’ ”

“I see; and”—for they were arrived by this at the top landing—“that’s 47, I take it. Not much of a place.”

“No, but you ain’t seen inside. There’s views inside.”

“Views of what?”

“Views of other people’s winders, other people’s businesses. An’ don’ you despise that. It done Pills for the Pulse naw ‘arm. No, en’ I mean it. ‘E was ep ‘ere in this winder one dye——” Mr. Higgs had unlocked the door and had led the way into a small room (“Fifteen by twelve,” he called it) with two small, grimy windows commanding the view he’d described. Imperial Buildings were arranged on the empty square principle, and people in back rooms could, on all sides but their own, see people in other back rooms on every level. There was a sort of spiritual indecency in this general exposure. The dreadful masquerade of the human soul had here to be maintained through the day if secrets were to be kept. But this fact was not one which affected Mr. Higgs. “ ‘E was in this winder one dye,” continued the liftman, “and ‘e looks out, and dahwn below,

orpysite, in block D that is, 'e could see a chep—one of them cheps, wot d'yer call 'em?—with colours——”

“A painter?”

“No, not a painter. I don' mean a feller that does work.”

“Artist?”

“Thet's it, that's it—them that uses colours but don't never do no work. Well there was this artist feller in the orfice dawhn there with a big piece of paper. It was an advert, that's what it was.”

“A what?” The eagerness once before observable in the face of the young man was showing again.

“Advert. What you sees on the walls. Pictures to try to make you bay things. Not that there's anything in it that ever I could see. I bought some 'Grip' as they call it once, cos I seen it advertised—stuff that they say makes yer strong enough to jump. It never done me no good, and then there was——”

“But what about the artist?” broke in the young man impatiently.

“Aren't I telling yer? 'E was 'olding up a picture 'e'd been droring. And 'e was 'olding it up in that orfice because why—because that there orfice is the orfice of Beech, the ad. agents.”

“Who?—the what?” Again that excitement in the younger man.

“Beech, the ad. agents. Son of 'is father—that's all 'e is. Naw ideas. Well, there was that young feller with 'is picture—it was a picture of a bloke that 'ed just taken a pill. But this was the thing

abaht the picture—the bloke 'ad a grin—it was a grin that met you, so to speak. It would go right across the street. I dessay you seen it—though you didn't see it cos Beech's took it up for 'im."

"You mean——"

"I mean Beech turned it dahn. Old-feshioned. Thet's 'im all over. And the young feller—decent enough young feller I'm told, and not 'is fault that 'e was only an artist—was beginning to wrap it up. But that grin that 'e'd stuck on 'is bloke in the picture was big enough to go right through the winder; an' so it did, and it went right up till it met young Pills for the Pulse standing in 'is winder up 'ere. Well, if Beech didn't see anything in that grin, Pills for the Pulse 'e did. An' 'e seems to 'ev guessed what 'ed 'appened, and thet the feller was turned dahn, for he jest rens out o' 'is orfice, 'its the bell for me, and I comes up at once (as I always do for tenants), and then dahn we goes together. And two minutes later there 'e was beck with a feller with long yeller 'air and a parcel what 'e called a porty-folio. And they didn't mind me 'earing. 'I saw they turned you down,' says Pills, 'an I saw thet what they didn't want was wot I did want, so you'd better come along up and talk abaht it. And so they did. Of course I didn't hear no more. But in a week thet grin was all over the plyce on the placards. And, look 'ere. 'Ere's the most *remarkable* thing!" Mr. Higgs, charmed and intrigued by the interest which he had evidently aroused in his listener, fluttered an oil-stained dexter finger towards the youth;

it seemed as if there was now being approached a climax so striking that the natural artist trembled lest he should fail in justice to the vast conception. “Yes, 'ere's the most remarkable thing. That grin being everywhere and me feeling a bit queer, one night I—I bought them there Pills for the Pulse myself.”

It was at this junction that there came the most astonishing occurrence of the whole incident—the occurrence which stands out for ever in a mind not vivid, not quick in its reactions to Life. Mr. Higgs found his hand gripped. True, he did not understand the slow, whimsical smile in the face of the young man, nor the sufficiently obscure words spoken—

“You're the man we are all watching!”

But, bemused though he felt, Higgs was gratified enough to attempt an answer.

“Didn't I tell you? Where, I sez, would the likes of you be without the likes of me serving in them there outposts of the——”

“No, no, Higgs,” broke in the young man with his odd enigmatical smile. “Outposts my eye! It's because you're the wise, advertisement-reading, money-spending public that I'm on to you——”

“Yer mean,” began Mr. Higgs doubtfully, reluctantly surrendering the supposed tribute to his services in India. “Yer mean because I bought them there pills?”

“Exactly, because you bought them there pills,” said the young man with great calm. He seemed to

find a subtle pleasure in using in his own mouth the precise inflexions of the being on whom he found himself spending some curious interest. "And because you bought them there pills, and because I like your face, I'm going to take this 'ere office."

"Yes, sir. Thank yer, sir." Mr. Higgs had an extraordinary sense of gratification; it was extraordinary because it was so completely unlike any kind of gratification he had ever experienced before.

For he could not in the least explain the circumstances in which he was being made the recipient of the commendations which were gratifying him so much. But he had an idea that when the young man said he would take the office the young man ought to be thanked in an official manner. He (Higgs) conceived of himself as standing there now in place of the entire board of directors of Imperial Chambers Ltd.; and there was the possibility of the fee.

"If you're taking the plyce, sir, I s'pose you wouldn't mind taking it from me, as you might say; me being the agent—matter of small commish comes into it, if you see what I mean."

"Oh, yes! Certainly, Higgs. I knew I'd get it—*Higgs!* Yes, Higgs, you can say that you let the place to me—that you swept away my objections in the torrents of your eloquence."

"Dunno what yer mean abaht torrents. Never 'ad no torrents"—Mr. Higgs seemed to think that he must not own to torrents—"but if you'll kindly say I let the orfice it'll be orl right for me."

"I will. That's settled. Make your mind easy.

I'll take possession to-morrow. And now you can run me down."

The journey to the ground took a minute only. It was on the ground floor that Higgs remembered something.

"You'll be seeing the company's secretary, I expect. But in case yer don't—in case I'm awsked—what would be the nime?"

He didn't know, because Fate cannot always be at our ear whispering to us that here is something relevant to the profound and tragic interpretation of life as we may some day come to write it—he didn't know that he should have dismissed much else from his mind to dwell the more fully upon this fact that now, for the first time, he heard this name spoken by the bearer of it.

"The name," said the young man, half turning, for he had already started towards the exit, "is Boxrider—Richard Boxrider."

CHAPTER II

If you should want to trace Boxrider's remoter origins you could do so, I suppose, by going down to Minton, N.E.—that last place on earth, that wide greyness in the panorama of London—“London over the border,” you are taught to call it—something too neutral to be mistaken for the London of colours and blacknesses—a place where men move, indistinguishable before that background to an end mysterious with that truest mystery which has succeeded, not in holding curiosity at bay, but in never letting it have being; and yet a place where each man is supported by the moral dignity of his own secret.

The Flatts Road Schools—one of those giant institutions where young human nature is dealt with on the mass production principle—it was there that he seems to have got such schooling as he did get. Asked to discuss him in the light of subsequent history, a bemused pale man with a narrow face, long nose and the pince-nez, badly balanced, that goes with the type, who admitted having been a master in the school, could be got to talk. He had a curiously spent air, and when he smiled, touching as he did his little straggly grey black beard, the smile struck you as being like the muscular reaction of the dead.

But he could certainly be got to talk. He had not turned out so many successes in the world that he could ignore those he *had* presented. He saw, he said, the greater part of the youth whom he'd tried to imbue with his few intellectual principles, in the shops of the district or carrying bricks up ladders or bestriding coal wagons. He used to wonder, having only an insecure philosophy, whether it was really worth the labour. "There's that Walets now. I really put in a bit o' work on him, and I thought he'd be some good. Figures were things he could play with—never knew a lad of his age more confident. But he sits on a lorry and doesn't add two and two once a week, unless it's to see he hasn't been cheated of his wages. And there's that George Smith. Quite a fist for freehand drawing. And seemed to like it too. But it's been no use to him since he's been on the bread round. And Peters—that boy was a reader. He found out I'd a few books. 'And could you lend them, sir?' Well, I did. He's read all Dickens and he's read history too. And blest if I didn't set him on to the 'Ancient Mariner.' And what's more he liked it. . . . When he came round to mend the roof, or rather to hold the ladder for the skilled man that did the job, 'Reading still?' I ask him. 'Well, no,' he says. 'Can't say I've got much time. . . .' They always run to that. No time. 'No time for Eternity,' as the old evangelists used to say. And I'm not sure they were not right. . . ."

He spoke with a weariness that made those who

heard him wonder if anything in the man now throbbed in unison with the great human reality signified in the story of any beginning.

“But, well, yes, Boxrider makes a change. Though mind you”—he paused, pushed his head forward in a way he had and, in continuing to speak, lowered his voice—“mind you, I don’t know that I understood him.” He spoke as a man does who knows details without their interpretation. “With those others now you knew where you were. With him . . . extraordinary fellow. Persistence though; that was the thing at the bottom. Of course he’d got what you call a nose. No, not for learning. I don’t mean exactly what you’d call learning. Useful knowledge—that was what he seemed to be after. He began presently on my library. Finished it off in three months. But it was one night when he came in to borrow a book that I began to know what he was after. ‘Got any books on pictures?’ he asked. ‘Not many. You’re not interested in pictures, though, are you?’ I said, and I laughed, for he’d been no good at freehand. ‘No. But I wanted to know about that stuff we used to learn. What was it called?—Perspective?’ ‘So you *do* want to draw?’ ‘No, sir, I don’t,’ he says, ‘but I’ll show you. Come to the window.’

“I was sufficiently puzzled. But I went to the window, and down in the street at the corner to which his finger pointed there was one of those advertisement hoardings. ‘See that, sir,’ he said. ‘That’s what I’m interested in; I want to know how

far away the things on that poster can be seen.' 'Do you think of painting things like that, Boxrider?' I asked him. 'No, I don't—but I might pay other people to do that some day.'

"I didn't say outright, 'What do you mean by that?' and there wasn't much more talk. I was puzzled, I admit, but not very greatly interested. I've so many of these boys going through my hands. A good fellow though, very scrupulous, I remember, in spite of being so cute; an unusual combination, I've found.'" He went on talking slowly, drearily. He'd not been profoundly stirred by that first revelation of a young intent. Perhaps he ought not to have been. But the thing had, and has, its relevance to this story, of course.

"I didn't hear news of him for a bit: lost sight of him, though I believe he was living at the old address; and then I heard he was in Jenkyns'—you know—on the Broadway. 'Jenkyns' Stores for Nearly Everything,' as they're called now. It was that boy who was responsible for the 'nearly.' Old Jenkyns was telling me about it. Boxrider, he said, came in one morning to 'see the chief.'

"'I thought,' says Jenkyns, 'he looked as if he'd the cheek for anything. But when he said he wanted a job, I gave him a chance as a junior hand in the toy department. But I soon found he was not the ordinary kind of junior hand. He'd been there a week when the department manager brought him to me. "This young man wants to speak to you." I was a bit busy, so I says, 'Out with it.'

“ ‘I’ve a suggestion,’ he says. ‘You call your stores “Jenkyns for Everything.” Why don’t you call it “Jenkyns for Nearly Everything?” ’

“ ‘Why on earth should I do that?’ I barked. I was a bit hit off my coco, but you know that lad was the kind that you couldn’t ignore—put outside, so to speak.

“ ‘Everybody says “for everything,” and it’s not true. Nobody’s thought of saying “nearly everything.” ’

“ ‘Oh, I see!’ says I. ‘Well, you’d better skip back to your work now and think about something else.’

“ ‘But,’ says Jenkyns. ‘I didn’t think about something else. I thought about that lad’s proposition. And I saw he was right. We gave up a little and we got a lot. I tried the new style—and we’re known from one end of London to the other now by that name. It’s become a catchword that goes with my name. Only yesterday there was a leader in the “Daily Views,” and that said Downing Street is becoming like Jenkyns’ Stores, the place for nearly everything. . . . And there you are,’ goes on Jenkyns. ‘Well, I used to give him some of our ads. to design after that—only we don’t do a great deal in that line of course. We’ve a big local trade, but not one that advertises a lot. All the same, I was thinking of finding him some kind of a job in my office—when he comes in one day and says he wants to give notice.

“ ‘Notice?’ says I. ‘Aren’t you satisfied?’

“ ‘It isn’t that, sir,’ he said, ‘I’m going to begin on my own.’

“ ‘What, as a General Stores—because——’

“ ‘No, sir,’ he cut in, ‘as a publicity expert. Going into the City and—I hope when you do want a little job doing you’ll remember me.’ ”

CHAPTER III

I

WELL, there he was duly established, you might say. There was a legend up and down those stairs within a week, or, one might more appropriately put it, up and down that lift. For Higgs, arbitrary as youth ordinarily found him to be, had decided in favour of that there young man up there; and the explanation of that approval was not alone to be found in the mere psychological one that Higgs' mind instinctively rendered reverence to tenants—that his conception of the mere word “tenant” was of something that was set forth in capitals, in the way a king's title ran. No, I should say, from what I've heard, that Higgs was a judge of character, and that even then Higgs was vaguely aware of the presence of circumstances dramatic and distinguished. Briefly, I'm pretty sure that that man, looking out of his pair of red eyes, knew that he looked at a Beginning. And so he whispered; and the whispers crept up and down that lift. There were men on those dim staircases who took the legend from their liftman as he safely delivered them in their narrow doorways.

“Smart young man thet. Very 'ot. Very 'ot, I should sye. 'E'll do things. I shouldn't be s'prised

if that there young man didn't stop long up there—if 'e didn't come down along of *you*."

Basford, of Basford & Basford, Solicitors, listened gloomily; all stories of success made him gloomy. He was a tall, grey-faced man, with lowered eyelids and a mouth which seemed about to dissent. But though he spoke very little he found it possible to say "Good morning" when next he and the new tenant ascended together.

As for Boxrider himself, he began to be pretty busy. He was searching the papers for commercial enterprises that plainly had no ideas behind them. And it was in that way that he discovered the "Bobs" chair. It occupied an inch on a back page; it had occupied the same place, he discovered by searching files, every Wednesday for six months, and a public not anxious to know was informed that "The 'Bobs' chair is worth many bobs. Give it a trial. Write for details."

He found the address was a by-street off Tottenham Court Road. "Gladden & Co., Chair Makers and Upholsterers. Proprietors and Makers of the 'Bobs' Chair."

Gladden, a man in early middle life, who'd probably been a working upholsterer, surveyed his visitor with no friendly eye as soon as he found he'd not come to place a contract.

"Who does my what? Publicity? Advertising you mean? Do it myself. None of your agents—middlemen for me. Think you can teach me my trade, I suppose. Nothin' doin'. Good morning."

But he discovered that his visitor, whom he was interviewing in a glass-sided office built up on the floor of the showroom, had found a seat—on a “Bobs” chair.

“It’s a good chair,” Boxrider was saying imperturbably. “It’s a pity you don’t push it.”

“Push it?” cried the other, off his guard. “We *do* push it.”

“Yes, with silly puns that ‘ud make anybody sick. If you want to put your public off give ‘em some rotten little pun. What do *you* do if somebody makes a pun in ordinary talk? You groan! Same here: a man reads about your chair and groans. He thinks you’re a fool—which you’re not; and he thinks your chair is a swindle—which it isn’t.”

“Very good of you to say so, I’m sure.” So spoke the heavy-witted man, clumsily sardonic, exposing the fact to Boxrider, all the same, that the visitor’s imperturbability had not merely impressed, it had subdued. His apparent freedom of speech had been tolerated by the furniture-maker because Gladden had grown up among men who said what they thought. (“I’m still a working man,” was his frequent boast.) All the same, he tried to check this youth by that irony: “It’s very good of you.”

“Oh!” says Boxrider now, “it’s good of me in a way of speaking. It’s good of me to warn you against puns. Not that your puns are the worst thing you do.”

“And what *is* the worst thing we do, since you are putting us right?”

“What! Well, it isn’t what you do so much as what you don’t. You don’t give a price. When I came in at the door I asked the price of the thing, and I was told forty-five shillings. Well, for a chair of this kind it’s cheap—dirt cheap. You ought to be selling thousands a year. But I bet you aren’t.”

“You think you know a lot, don’t you?” (All the same, I believe it is a fact that Gladden hadn’t got any useful business out of his advertisement.)

“Oh, I think I know something! Look here. I’m ready to go bail that, when you sell, you sell through window displays in this out-of-the-way hole.”

“Well, and suppose——”

“Suppose it’s true? Exactly! People see the chair and see it’s cheap—and buy it. But in your ad. you tell ‘em to write for particulars. Who’s going to write for particulars? They don’t want to be involved in correspondence with you. They think it’s a dodge—that it’s a rotten old chair and the maker wants a lot of money for it. Seven guineas, or something like that, they figure as the price—maybe fifteen; and if once he gets our address we’re done. That’s what they think. You say they’re fools. They’re not. They’re not clever, but they’ve a certain amount of common sense, and they’ve not too much money to spend, the majority of them. So, if you’ve got something good and cheap to offer, *give ‘em your price right away*; all the fortunes have been made by the man who quotes——”

“Sounds all right.” Gladden was shrewd; he recognized—he’d always done so really—that though

he knew how to make the best chair at the price in London, and though he knew how to sell it across the counter, he'd never discovered how to reach the outside public. "Sounds all right. We *haven't* got an enormous crop of orders, as a matter of fact. In fact, I'd been thinking of withdrawing the ad."

"Don't you do anything of the kind, Mr. Gladden. There're men in Wigan and Milford Haven and Dunbar who ought to be sitting in that chair. They've as much right to that chair as the man who passes your window."

"Then what am I to do? Leave the ad. but cut down my space?"

"Cut down your space? *Double* your space—quadruple your space, sir. But leave me to write the ad. And, see here, my fees are not low. They're high—they've got to be. I don't work for everybody. But, see here. I believe you're an honest man. You deal fair. Very well. I don't charge you a halfpenny till we get results. But when you get the result I know you will pay my fee."

"Done."

That was actually the first commission. As you're probably sitting on a "Bobs" chair to read this, with perhaps your feet on another, you will recognize that the easiest of receptacles for a weary body is pretty well distributed. But it is possible that you never heard before how you came in the first instance to discover that such a chair existed.

II

I have said that he was noticed in Imperial Buildings. Gladden mentioned him to a man who was running a brain-training scheme from a first floor in B, and the man sent round for him.

“I don’t know much about publicity, except that it’s a rotten game.”

Boxrider put him down as a disgruntled schoolmaster—which, as a matter of fact, he was; a lean and anæmic creature with weak eyes, Barberry by name.

“It’s a rotten game if you’ve got a rotten thing to sell,” said Boxrider.

“What I’ve got to sell isn’t rotten though,” said Barberry, petulant at once.

“I didn’t say it was. But if it’s a good thing, then publicity’s the best game you can play.”

“Oh, indeed?”

“Yes. Fact. But we’ll soon test your goods. You’ve got three courses?”

“Yes. What we call our ‘Applied Reading Course,’ our ‘General Training Course,’ and our ‘Culture Course.’ The second and third are progressive from the first.”

“I suppose that a chap who started with one could go to the next if he chose?”

“Certainly.”

“Well, as a matter of fact *does* he?”

“Yes, he does.” Barberry was getting excited

now. It was a simple matter to excite him. "Half our people do that. But I don't see—"

"Then it's a sound thing. See? If I was thinking of taking your course, which I'm not—but if I was, and yet was hesitating, and I heard that the men who began went on, I'd not hesitate any more. But I've had to come to you and ask you personally. Now, if I'd been writing your ad. the whole world would know that your customers come back."

"We don't call them customers," Barberry was beginning.

"A quibble. I can help you—if you want help. When do I begin?"

And so there was another client!

But Barberry was not the only other person in Imperial Buildings who had been made aware of this Boxrider, Advertising Agent. There was that man down in D on whom Boxrider's eye had rested on that morning of his first visit to the chambers. Standing in the little room which was to be his and peering, at the behest of Higgs, through the grimy window upon the offices below, he had looked into Beech's office.

It is perhaps significant of more things than one that Boxrider discovered Beech before Beech was aware of Boxrider. That a rival tradesman had set up in the building was made known to Beech by his senior clerk, using that easy familiarity which, as an observer might have thought, characterized Beech's employees when addressing their master.

“There’s another man opened in our building. Saw him this morning. Cocksure-looking bloke; ought to be at school. Been here a week.”

“Oh, indeed?” says Beech.

He was a man of about thirty-five at the time—this Beech; tall, slightly stooping, shaved with what struck one as a pronounced, even an excessive, scrupulosity, an indicative scrupulosity—a cut across the chin suggested a nervous scrupulosity—and with dark eyes. What one noticed first, though, was the pointedness of the features.

The “Oh, indeed?” was not superciliousness. It was something recognizable as characteristic of the man. But what the man was can perhaps best be shown by a little exploration of what the man had been.

To-day you suspected that Life was just a little too much for him—that it knew just enough tricks to baffle him; and it was of a mind conscious of defeat and half angry but uncertain how it had been conquered that one always had an impression. Outwardly he preserved the manners of his class—the instinctively good manners of a man whose father had done well enough to send him to a public school. It had not been a first-class public school. But the man was what you would call a gentleman—even (as he would have said bitterly), even remembering how he earned his living, a gentleman. That brings us right up to one of the secret causes of his failure—his initial failure. I don’t say that it was the most important cause, because certainly that

must have been a mere failure in essential force, in sheer moral authority, in clearness and depth of vision. In short, and finally, this Beech was one of that type marked by an intellectual deficiency the results of which, to an observer, can appear so poignant. But the matter of deficiency in moral authority was related to that other matter of his being a gentleman.

CHAPTER IV

I

BRIEFLY, Beech was darkly suspicious of his own business. He had inherited it—and at a time in his life when he was under the sway of an original and astonishing intellectual force—that of his father—a crude genius, a born charlatan and an immense material success. His father had been a little hampered by want of capital. But, then, how had his father begun? In the market-place selling cheap-jack china with flaws, or cough-drops across a barrow. The shuddering fancy of young Beech could often see that father of his—tall, gaunt, ragged—with his hungry eyes and glib tongue pushing his cough-drops almost literally down his customers' throats. They were “customers” then; later, when there was an old wagonette and his father—in that dreadful astrakhan coat which went so well with the big imitation diamond rings—could make speeches, he talked about his “patients.” How well the boy could visualize those scenes in the London-over-the-border market towns, Barnet and Epping and even as far as Canterbury. His father had not married until he was forty, so that Thomas Beech, his son, had scarcely any actual remembrances of those times. And one day, as still bitterly he remembered,

he had come across some old cuttings of advertisements—advertisements proclaiming to some town (he thought it was Brighton) their “good fortune in being visited by the famous optical specialist, Mr. Sebastian Beech.” (Eyes were catered for as well as stomachs.) He had never cared to ask his father if it *had* been Brighton; everything that he could use to separate himself from those early days he did; so that he was not likely to take down the walls which blocked memory or to dispel the mists of time which had gathered to offer merciful oblivion to a dreadful past. As for the “Sebastian,” his father’s name had been George, but “nobody’d buy cough drops from a mere George.” (He remembered how his father’s eyes, notable for their large, moist kindness, had flashed a vast contempt for the world he served and, as his son conceived things, robbed.)

But by the time Thomas Beech was twelve, his father had given up the cheap-jack trade, and, realizing that there was business in pushing other people’s goods, had founded Beech & Co.—which must have been one of the earliest advertising agents (using the term in its modern sense) in the City of London. Now, whether he was glad in the circumstances that his father had exchanged the barrow for an office desk was a point as to which the boy could not be sure.

If his father had stuck to the cough drops, when *he* (Thomas) came to the day in his life when he must begin to learn a trade, he might have had

greater liberty of choice. His father could not very well have forced him to sell cough drops. Apart from everything else, he had not the required blaten-
tancy of utterance. His father, therefore, could not have . . . and yet he did not know. He could remember so many things. . . .

Well, that advertising business paid from the be-
ginning. The “firm” made money and went on do-
ing so, so that presently the sole proprietor had a
pleasant house at Winstead in Essex with a long
garden running down to the Great Eastern, where
he loved to wander on half-holiday afternoons ig-
norantly counting up the blooms which a paid gar-
dener laboured to produce.

“What’s that red thing? A *what*? A *pee-ony*?
Never heard of it. Looks nice, though. Better tell
William to put in a couple of dozen more.”

“But, George, it would spoil the effect.” That protest came from his wife. I have often thought I would have liked to have met Mrs. Beech—one of those delicate, imaginative women with large hazel eyes, tall, small-chested, hesitant, and with sensi-
bilities that ran to welcome Force. That was why she had married that big, ugly, moist, overflowing husband of hers. Force, strength—get what you want and take no denial. She had dreamed as a girl (remember those were the days of romantic fiction—the 'seventies and 'eighties—with Realism still blessed years away); she had dreamed of being crushed and captured and carried off. And I should think that the dream had come true. He had dawned

upon her father as a man in early middle life rapidly making money in the City—"pushes patent medicines and things—an advertising agent—in a biggish way."

It was thus her father had learnt the story, and her father had brought him home one day, and Beech had spun a tale—and he could always spin a tale—of being lonely, which he *must* have been, and, "If only I could find somebody to take pity on me." He had said that very soon after he had spotted the girl, and in a fortnight—blest if he had not got her for his own. She had struggled; she had seen and been astonished and even, I believe, been disgusted by his crudities. But she had given way. And she really felt that night as she sat on after he had gone, with a big diamond glittering on her small hand and with her whole being reacting almost violently to his strenuous love-making, that her dream had come true. She had been conquered—captured.

She was thrilled and terrified and almost sick with joy. The ring—it was one of his own. She did not like him wearing rings, but she knew she would never dare tell him so—that she never would dare to tell him anything. Well, she did not care. She wanted him; and so extreme became the character of her passion that she delighted even in the very things her mind ordinarily hated. She drew her fresh memories of his crudities right under her mental eye, as though each was a new facet in a stone of dangerous but unequaled beauty.

And that ring hanging absurdly on her finger

until he could bring her one for herself became the symbol of himself, and she pressed it to her lips, embracing his faults, his wonderful and overwhelming faults, and finally falling on her knees to pray for that crude genius which was now hers.

There you have the mother. It is less difficult now to realize the mind of that youth as he developed. He and his mother never talked of his father's early beginnings. He knew that his mother felt as he did. She was bound to do. But there was always a curious subtle sense of evasion of certain things when they discussed his father. As he grew up, though, there were moments when he had a kind of jealousy.

. . . His mother loved him. But she did not merely love his father: it was not love, it was a kind of idolatry. To him the phenomenon was incomprehensible—utterly. But his own feelings were all engaged by his mother. As he came to realize his father's character and the character of the business on which their fortunes had been built, he would have been glad to repudiate it all. He would have liked to be trained for a profession. One day he told his mother, and he remembered always afterwards the mingled pain and sympathy he discovered in her face: a pain because it was unendurable to her to be brought in contact with any reflection of her husband which did not exalt him as *her* mind had done; sympathy because those extraordinary crudities of his sometimes struck at her as they did always at her son. Her reply was at once an evasion and a compromise, for it was now that the boy was sent

to Redburn, the old Yorkshire school where her brothers had been educated. He knew that in that way his mother had dealt with his heart.

Afterwards he used to wonder if she regretted what she had done. Because the effect was natural enough; he became more acutely conscious than ever of his father's social deficiencies, more painfully aware of that past of a market-place. Once or twice he even meditated a protest: "I say, you know, father," or something of that kind, and once he had run out of the room, anywhere away from his father. He could still miserably remember that occasion. His father had just presented him to Bradder—Bradder who made pills and employed Beech to advertise them.

"That's my lad. Looks as if he'll be a real tip-topper, eh? I've had him educated at a tip-top school. None of your parlour boarders. Didn't you say, Tom, you'd got 'an honourable?' You what—you don't remember?"—for that was what the boy would try to put forward by way of answer.

"You'll remember quick enough. And that's the kind of schooling, Bradder, my boy's had. That ought to fit him to take over from me, eh, and get the big solid firms to give me their work? The boy to do the real 'I'm as-big-a-man-as-you' talk, eh?"

The boy had run from the room. He had gone to his mother; and he had found her sad, and he had known she was not sad for the reason that *he* was, not really; for though she shrank back from her husband's noisy jocularities, she invariably flew to

him again, accusing herself of a disloyalty, or merely fascinated anew by his incredible bigness. She was sad because she knew that the public school had been a mistake: or her son suspected that that was the explanation. She certainly never told him.

And then, quite suddenly, in an effort to present him with a brother or sister, his mother died.

For him the house was entirely empty for years afterwards—empty of life, beauty, reality, empty of everything but a strange, noisy tintinabulation of shrill jests, shouted vulgarities. . . . He grew to hate his father. He believed that his mother's death had affected his father very little. Indeed, in a week or two the man was noisier than ever. Bradder was always coming there now, and when Bradder was not there to scream (he expressed himself by means of a high treble like a pig in the agony of death) there were other like spirits.

He could have seen his father fall dead without a hesitation. And yet repulsive as the man seemed to him, he had had a curious emotion which, oppose it though he might, he found grew with his knowledge of other men. This feeling was the result of a growing conviction that his father was a bigger man than any he had ever met. The fact, when he saw it, alarmed and confused him; he ran easily to alarms and confusions. He hated his discovery; but the result was that he began to understand the fascination his mother had felt.

But he yielded to the pull of his father's personality with an unwillingness which expressed itself

in hatred. His father, he declared to himself, had murdered his mother, and having looked at this work gaily had turned back into life again with a guffaw.

And then one day he saw something really rather curious. There was a little room upstairs looking out upon the garden of the house at Winstead. This had been his mother's room in a special degree. One day he had been at the foot of the stairs when he had seen his father at the top. He had intended to go to his own room, but when he reached the passage on the first floor he hesitated, for he had observed his father with a hand on the door of his mother's room.

The son's first emotion was one of irritation. But it occurred to him then that never before had he seen his father in that doorway since his mother's death. Swiftly though his mind explored the past, he could only remember seeing his father pass the door and descend the stairs before calling out some loud pleasantry to Bradder . . . and his father had gone in now on tip-toes.

That was all. But the younger Beech was, and remained, immensely impressed. A few minutes later he could hear a bell rung below; the front door was being opened, and then there came the sound of a maid's voice announcing to her master, understood to be upstairs somewhere, "Mr. Bradder."

Young Beech listened.

He did not have long to wait. There was a sound of quick, light-stepping feet, a sudden noisiness on

the stairs, a loud strident laugh, and then: “What? You Bradder? Are you for bowls? H’m!—haw, haw! Haven’t had your weekly swiping yet, my boy. But it’s waiting for yer. The lawn’s ’ad its ’air cut and its chin scraped specially for the occasion. Haw, haw, haw!”

The noise was not improvised and yet there had been that silence—that almost inconceivably significant silence. . . . At last we have got his father. For that was the man. And young Beech surrendered then. And given that the boy was what he was, his father was bound to win when the day of battle came.

There was bound to be that battle. The battle-field was one he knew. He had surveyed it years before. He had known, and he knew that his mother had known, that some day there would be that battle precisely there. He had looked often for some place of vantage, some strong point where he could set himself to repel the attack—for he saw himself defending rather than attacking.

And on that misty morning in November, two years after his mother had left the house so empty, he knew that the hour of conflict had come. His father had been sitting back with three or four empty, greasy, after-breakfast plates before him, and had been wiping his beard and moustache free of coffee. He hated all that hair on his father’s face; he had once tried to frame a kind of social proverb—a vile punning thing, something about people with defective memories not giving them-

selves hairs, unnecessarily—and then his father had spoken.

“We’ve got half of that page in this rag to-day for Bradder. We don’t often get half-page business, though, even in papers like this.” The youth was reading the blatant appeal to use the remedy manufactured by the intolerable Bradder.

“Well, well,” his father was running on, “we ’aven’t got the really big people—the people who buy space by the page regularly and that take entire hoardings. I suppose it’s a matter of manner. I can get business—good business—but not the business that would land me in Park Lane. No, those big capitalist fellers, been to good schools, lots of ’em nowadays, and I don’t seem to ’it it with them. I’m in my element with old Bradder. But these stiff Johnnies, with their frock-coats and their pinched way of speaking, they don’t altogether approve of me. An adventurer, a quack. That’s what they call me. Perhaps you can guess.”

The young man could; but he could not speak—only look uneasy.

“Oh, I know! You needn’t try to say they don’t—they *do*. But one of these days it’ll be different—when you come into the firm.”

“When I come in, father?” He repeated the words slowly and with a kind of trembling resentment. “But I don’t know that I—I want to.”

“Not want to?” Beech brought his great hand with its big diamond ring down on the table. “You can’t mean that—you’re not such a gump as that.

Why—why!”—he seemed too astonished to find the appropriate words—“the ball’s at your feet. I’ve built that business up so that it’ll go like a spun wheel! It’s *there*. It’s a *thing*. What—what—yer don’t mean you’re such a born fool as to want to keep out and be—be——”

“I thought I’d like to be a lawyer.”

“A what? A lawyer? You! What good would you be as a lawyer? You’re not the sort. Cold-blooded, that’s what those fellers are, every one of ‘em. No, I was going to say try again. But you don’t try again. You come in with me. I trained you for that. What did you get sent to Redburn for if it wasn’t to know how to behave with big men? I made a gentleman of you. But I didn’t make a gentleman of you so that you could go grubbing for dirty six-and-eightpences among filthy files of parchments. You’re coming in with me.”

“But I’d really rather not, father.”

The man stood up, looking at the boy.

“I believe—I believe you really mean what you say. Not that I’m going to listen. I’ve too much regard for your real interests to listen. But I do believe that you mean it. So that——” he began to ruminate in an odd way of his own. “Tom, I’m thinking your mother was right.”

“Mother—where does mother come into it?”

“She said”—he noticed how his father’s voice had become soft and how all the vigour was out of his manner—“she said you’d kick. . . . I said you wouldn’t. I didn’t say I wouldn’t let you. I said

you'd never kick, because a man doesn't quarrel with his bread and butter when there's butter on both sides. But she said you'd kick. And d'you know this, Tom—d'yer know she wrote a bit of paper I was to give you if you did kick?"

"He certainly had not anticipated opposition, because he had not got the paper at hand," thought his son.

The man strode across to a locked desk, used a key, and at last came back with an envelope.

Thrusting it into his son's hand, he turned and walked out. A moment later the boy heard the outside door close and the sound, outside, of his father's retreating footsteps. He could always remember how his name, written in her hand, stood out before his unsteady gaze. A letter. . . . It was like a letter from the other world. He could have expected some heavenly postmark.

He almost hated to break the seal. But he did at last and began slowly to read.

"**M**Y DARLING TOM—I have a feeling that some day your father will want you to go into the business with him and that you will feel that you don't want to. I think, though, that you'd like to know how I felt. . . . I'd like you to go to him if you can. And the things which I know you don't like will seem less important some day than now. It is so easy when one is young to judge harshly and crudely. I think, Tom, dearest, you ought to go to your father."

There were a few more words and that was all. He got up and walked about the room. But he knew that the battle was over.

Only years after did he wonder if he had been ambushed by a mother who loved her husband still more than she loved her son; only then did he question her right to intervene, to sacrifice him to the man whom she had loved with that strange passion of hers.

But even now did he suffer a kind of wistful astonishment; his mother with her perceptions: how did she miss what he had seen or believed he had seen—the vulgarity, the essential absurdity of the means by which they lived. How had she continued that extraordinary idealization of a man practising a ridiculous and ignoble business—the business of advertising other people's business . . . advertising—that practice of coarse, blatant minds.

All the same her letter had given him the law. He entered his father's office at eighteen. Being there, he found, was quite as bad as he had expected; and added to his hatred of the place, the work, and the men with whom the work brought him in contact, he was penetrated by a sense of his own incompetence. The men whom he so much disliked despised him—were even contemptuously amused by his young, nervous *hauteur*; but they are not to be blamed if they did not trouble themselves to put business his way. “The old man—yes, a rough diamond,” they would say, “but a jewel all the same.”

But *this* chap! He can bring that nose of his a bit lower and begin to look less of a fool first."

Beech was vaguely aware of this hostility. But he did nothing—perhaps was not able to do anything—to abate it. Everything was still advertised in his father's characters, and he turned away in sharp disgust.

Then, quite suddenly, his father died. Heart. Business on earth at 12.30 noon, and no more business ever to be done on earth again after that. Died in his chair.

Young Beech was not really young Beech any longer. He was twenty-eight. Any hopes he had had of starting in some other line had long been failing. His father had made his bed for him and he must lie in it. In other words, he had got to carry on the only profession he knew anything about. In a few years, if he saved, and was careful, it might be possible to get out—retire.

Here, incidentally, is a curious trait to be noticed in the character of Beech: hating his father's trade, he hated also the idea of living in what is called a "reduced way." He had all the nervous pride of people of his kind. He had formed luxurious tastes, had his quiet club, and his good tailor; and if he retired now to live on the interest of the money his father had left he would have to change his way of living. He did not improve matters by taking a part of what his father had left him out of the three per cents (as they were then) and investing it in certain obscurely known South African industrials.

“Don’t you be a mug,” Bradder told him (Bradder was an executor); “your father wouldn’t touch muck of that kind.”

“I think I ought to know my own business best.”

Bradder had shrugged his wide shoulders and said no more. He said nothing even when, as was bound to happen, the industrials first stopped paying a dividend and then went into liquidation. On his father’s death Beech had given up the house at Winstead and had taken a flat in some mansions in Haverstock Hill. He liked to be near libraries, the Queen’s Hall, and his club. But he found he was spending money. He also found that business was beginning to decline. He knew he was not at ease, or even ordinarily amiable, in the company of the men who had business to give out; and that, even when he went out, as he did at rare intervals, to try to pick up business, they thought him difficult of comprehension. And, to such, a man who is not easily comprehensible is ridiculous. One or two, for his father’s sake, offered him commissions; but when he set himself to write out their advertisements he was insensibly hindered by a self-consciousness, a certain horrible literary fastidiousness, which brought him to grief whenever he tried a flight of necessary vulgarity. He would begin again then, using stiff, essay-like English, and produce a long screed of a kind to justify the remark of Bilsom’s Boot Polish, “Thought you’d joined ‘The Times’ and were doing a leader on the advantages of polish, till I stumbled on our name.”

Finally he would attempt a feeble, vulgar strain, a thin familiarity of diction, an emasculate commonness which disgusted the educated—himself most of all—while it earned the contempt of the vulgar.

His business was going down. That was clear. Some of his best men, too (his father had employed four canvassers), had left him, and he had not filled their places. Which brings us to another of this man's troubles. During his father's lifetime, even *he* had had a nervous suspicion that the staff—his own staff—did not take him very seriously; and when he succeeded to authority he confirmed his suspicion. Those canvassers who had gone had told him flippantly and without veiling their contempt that they could work for his father but not for him. “Got to go where there's scope,” one of them had said.

“Go then,” he had cried furiously. He used to sit there figuratively biting nails in a wild, weak fury. Like all weak men, his accusation was not against himself but against Fate. He had been trapped, he told himself, by Life. It never occurred to him to consider whether, as a matter of fact, the door of the trap had not been left open—for years; whether, for the sake of certain comforts—natural comforts . . . that could not be spared—whether for the lack of a little courage to face a world of the unknown . . . he had waited.

But his plaint ran still. . . . There was he who ought to have been living a life of quiet leisure—there was he sitting in this private office scarcely

shut off from those impudent swine . . . and losing his business, losing such income as was left to him.

True he had still got the Kingford's Cocoa connexion. But not all of it now. Kingfords had begun to hint, and had then given away a contract to another. He had seen an advertisement which he had known was his own; he had rung up Kingford himself. . . . He had not been able to suppress a certain protest. And there was Kingford, smooth-spoken, at the other end.

“It’s quite all right. We—we want more pep. Oh, yes! we’ll give you business still. *Some* business.”

And once it had been *all* their business. There might yet come a day. . . .

II

Boxrider had agreed with himself from the beginning to despise that man down there in D. Bringing off his own first small successes, he used to wonder what kept Beech alive. “Doesn’t look as if he knew the first thing.” And really Beech didn’t. You could see him any morning drifting in about ten, his figure irresolute, his air apologetic. “I was meant to be a gentleman and I’m trying to be a cheap-jack, and I’m not doing it effectively.”

Something like that may have represented his thought. It was his curious habit to explain himself, when he had to do so for a directory, as “a general agent.” He had not the smallest idea of what

the term meant; but at least he did not own himself an advertising agent. On his door he called himself merely "Beech—Agent." So that not everybody knew that he handled advertising. And yet there were moments when he would have a wish to increase his business—hate it though he did. The truth was that his connexions still dwindled. So that to-day the only important connexion he had—and it was one which he now shared with two other firms—was the Kingford one. Kingfords still gave him business—as they put it—"for his father's sake." It gave him no pleasure to be told that: he would have liked to forget his father, and to have felt that the world also had forgotten him.

Kingfords of late had increased their hints that they would like to see a little more vigour in his propaganda. He had said he would see to it; but he did not know that he could claim that he *had* seen to it. And if he lost Kingfords he was done for. Moreover, on Kingfords and such other business as he could maintain depended his chance of retirement. He alone knew how he dreamed of that day of release—the day when he would have acquired the sum which would buy him the annuity on which he could live in approved retirement for the rest of his life.

And now the hope by which he had been kept up seemed slowly to be sinking. He saw himself now feebly hanging on to such poor remnants as he had, and then one day finding his support gone and himself swallowed up. His spirit explored dark possibilities; again he saw Life in terms of a gigantic

unfairness. All the things he could have enjoyed had been withheld: leisure, culture, and (in the real sense) marriage. . . .

He flushed. Yes, marriage. He could have been happy with an understanding woman. Starved . . . yes. His face would grow dark . . . and no new business ever came. In a moment of passionate energy—the kind that alone was characteristic—he wrote out an order to a sign-writer to come and declare him an “advertising agent”—“advertisements may be inserted in the press throughout the world”—but when he read the legend it seemed so flat compared with the kind of thing his father used to put up that he tore up the letter. . . . And there was that young swine on the other staircase, a mere vulgarian, a creature risen out of some neighbouring gutter . . . a man like—yes, like his own huckster father . . . and that young man, only at the work three months, would rank *him* as a fool and a failure. What was the name of the fellow? (He had taken the trouble to inquire because of a suspicion that people who came to the building with a vague idea that there was an advertising agent somewhere on the premises went upstairs rather than to his office.) . . .

Boxrider! That was it. Well, to this Boxrider the matter of that legend upon the door would be the simplest of affairs: a mere preliminary. He understood that this Boxrider was what the world called, in its sordid idiom, “getting on.”

In this ignoblest of means of livelihood it seemed

odd to believe that there could be degrees of success. His contempt for his job prevented his being seriously troubled by a sense of the other's rivalry; and so he did not actually hate Boxrider. He used to say to himself that he pitied any man who could voluntarily have entered such a "profession." It gave him a moment of thin, cynical amusement to call his occupation a "profession."

III

To Boxrider, Beech remained for a month or two "that fellow in D." He understood the man was in the same line as himself, but he was not really interested. Boxrider was, in his own words, "out for the big stuff." He meant to model himself on Crocks Ltd., who had those big four windows in the Strand and "projected publicity for 'Tip-Top Tea,' 'Rex's Starch,' 'Tranquillity' underwear, and 'Runnagate-on-Sea.' " "Beech," he tossed the name impatiently from him. Boxriders have no use for the little men who offer to insert fifty advertisements in the provincial press—the "Wigan Weekly Examiner," the "Keighley Gazette," the "Croydon Review," for an infinitesimal sum.

It was Higgs—with whom his curious intimacy continued—that gave him a new and remarkable idea. They were going up in the lift one morning two months after Boxrider's establishment here.

"There was another two lots that came 'ere asking for you. Took 'em up myself yesterday."

“Yes, I got them.”

“Well, but at one time it wouldn’t ‘ev been you they’d ‘ev been arfter. They’d be arfter that other party—Mr. Beech in D.”

“Oh, indeed?” said Boxrider, who for some reason seemed interested to-day.

“But thet was because of ‘is father. It was thet fur coat as did it then. Mr. Beech that *is*, ‘e don’t wear no fur coat,” continued this philosopher, playing with a fact the significance of which has occupied intelligences more complex and distinguished. “But some of ‘em still goes to ‘im from remembering ‘is father, and because, too, they knows ‘e ‘es the running of that there Kingford’s Cocoa——”

“What?” cried Boxrider. “You mean”—but he had already mastered a sudden excitement; there were things which one should not allow one’s voice to give away—“you mean that Kingfords let him do their business *now?*”

“Well, yes, though ‘e keeps it dark. So the lift in D was telling me. Kingfords—I ‘eppen to take it myself of an evening to keep the cold out; it’s better than Boggs’, I always think, and so I was a-telling the lift in D, and ‘e sez, ‘S’pose yer didn’t know thet thet Beech that we ‘as ‘ere writes some of ‘em very adverts. for that very Kingfords?’ An’ he does, only, as I sez, ‘e don’t seem to talk abaht it.”

Boxrider did not profess further to be interested, but he was profoundly so. He was so interested that he took to observing Beech from the window; in fact, he gave much of his rather too considerable

leisure to that observation, and he came to have an idea of the extent of the business.

This idea differed somewhat from his first notion: there could be no doubt that while Beech had not a big clientele, it was quite a valuable one. It had been that father of his who had given it to him. If he (Boxrider) heard aright, the hopeless ass was ready to despise his father! He did some work in the provinces for "Tranquillity" underwear, he did copy for "Bright's Office Furniture," and, much the most important of all, he did some of Kingford's work. It was what might be called a very sound foundation—for a young man with an understanding.

All the same, I do not know that *that* idea really came at once. But things that happened, or did not happen, made it easier for the idea to grow. The fact is the people who had given him something to do in response to his importunities were of the kind that seem big, but that are small. There are hundreds such, filling the columns of the press or hanging their blatant legends across the hoardings. They stake their little beggarly all in the one throw of the dice—take the front page of the "Daily Home," even if it involves an overdraft; and hope for luck. There are some very big people who were very small people a short time ago, and who grew big from little because they risked everything on some wild, spendthrift action. But there are more little people who grow somewhat less little each year by means of some occasional small effort. The

“‘Bobs’’ lounge chair was of that kind. They would not have anything else for Boxrider for six months. “Oh, yes! Perfectly satisfied with your work, and we’ll give you another job when we can. But we’re not ‘Tranquillity’ or ‘Kingford.’ ”

No, they were not Kingford. That was precisely it. And nobody else who happened to blow in happened to be Kingford. And if you wanted to open up with the big houses it was necessary to have as client somebody who *was* Kingford—or of Kingford’s kind. Once you get one of these big fish on your hook you could fill your basket.

So, you see, the idea, if it did not come at once, did come.

IV

Beech sat in the unnecessarily large office, as he considered it, which his father had occupied in other days. The more blatant decorations wherewith the senior Beech had sought to impress clients or prospective clients had been removed. The carpet woven to represent the Union Jack—“the best bit of publicity ever invented,” as his father used to call that national flag—had been removed to give place to a drab green Axminster. The illuminated address presented to his complacent parent by neighbours on his departure from an earlier home at Clapton—an address which had testified in extremely adulatory terms to its hero’s “sterling worth, upright character and far-reaching influence” (it was, of course, the adulatory touch which had entirely filled

with nausea the son)—this address had been thrust down behind the safe. The coloured pictures of Queen Victoria and of types of the British Army had been surreptitiously given away to the lift in D, while only the framed picture of an insipid-looking, chinless young man (*circa* 1885), with side whiskers and a coat too small for him, who had apparently been surprised in the act of sipping Kingford's, was suffered to remain upon the walls. This vision of youth had this obscure antiquarian interest that it was the first pictorial representation of the popularity of Kingfords.

Beech kept a staff of three. *Item.*—A clerk in middle life, James by name, who had been office boy in the time of Beech, senior. This weary, mottled James kept the books and could, when put to it, turn out an advertisement of a certain approved pattern. *Item.*—Bexley, a younger man somewhat overgrown, with a long, sloping forehead, pale blue eyes with a statically impertinent expression, and a pimpled chin and neck, both much exacerbated, who collected the accounts, bargained for space, and generally represented the house out of doors. *Item.*—Matthew, a Jewish youth, upon whom Bexley inflicted the current jest against the chosen people, to the subtle amusement of the Hebrew himself, who had, of course, from the first, shared in the secret of his race that it is theirs to suffer—and to come out on top.

Beech, who instinctively craved for feminine sympathy, would have liked to have kept a woman typist,

but never had had the courage to engage one. Even as things stood it was a question whether his weak hand controlled the reins, or whether the steeds directed their master. And then suddenly, almost violently, at a quarter past ten o'clock on a dark morning in November—on what must be called an historic morning, dark enough for a thousand golden eyes to come to a thousand windows and peer out in curiosity at the gloom (there certainly was not a warehouse in this part of London where the lights were not up)—there presented himself at the counter in this office, before the inspection of the smiling Jew, a young man. The office boy had begun to smile before he had discovered the visitor. Bexley had been reciting:

The Jew stood on the burning deck
Whence all but he had fled,
But any sheeny'd risk his neck
To see the fire was fed—

At this point Matthew had discovered he was wanted at the counter. But he still smiled, and he did not seem to require the name of the caller.

“Mr. Beech? Yes, sir.” (Only Matthew said “thir.”) “It’s Mr. Boxrider, isn’t it?”

Boxrider it was. That was the beginning of an historical incident.

And now in the doorway of Beech’s private room stood that Hebrew, smiling with the rather magniloquent cheerfulness of a race that knows it is going to win.

“Who?” cried Beech—*twittered*, one might almost say. “I—haven’t any appointment to see him. Don’t know him either. I’m—I’m too busy. Say that. I don’t desire to see him.”

“Which am I to say, sir?” asked Matthew impudently enough.

As has been suggested, it was to Beech a source of humiliation which yet he dared not acknowledge that his staff treated him lightly. And meeting the eye of that boy for the brief moment in which he dared to meet it, he let himself be reminded that the smile would not have been there if his father had been sitting where he sat.

He felt suddenly appalled by the thought of his own weakness in the mere handling of an office staff. It seemed, too, as if at the moment memories and impressions must crowd in upon him—as if, at least, some subconscious self realized the profound significance of the immediate occasion. . . . How these ideas came. James. Just the other side of the door, James. James would spend an hour out in the middle of the morning and assume the air of the old trusted employee if remonstrated with. “I think, Mr. Beech” (with great dignity), “considering I was with your father—” and Beech would give way with a kind of groan. But all the time he would know that James was laughing at him out of doors, and even of late in company with Bexley. As for Bexley, his glib impertinences were so general that a dozen times his employer had sought courage to dismiss him. Only he had an idea that Bexley

did a good deal of useful work for the firm and was beginning to be that dreadful thing called "indispensable."

These ideas swept through his brain again as they had done often before as he sat back turning his uneasy eye quickly away from that of that wretched, smiling Jew.

But Matthew still waited for some answer—some definite answer. "He's enjoying my confusion," thought Beech; "he's waiting for me to struggle out of it; he's watching me."

"Say I'm too busy."

"Yes, sir."

The young Jew came out slamming the door behind him and went across to Boxrider.

"He says" (with a grin) "he's too busy, sir."

"Take that grin off and go back and tell him the matter's very urgent."

Matthew, with some attempt to suppress the offending smile, returned to his employer. He was delighted to have an opportunity to maintain an annoyance.

"He says he must see you, sir. Matter's very urgent."

Beech sprang up in nervous fury.

"Bring him in then! Bring him in then!"

Still smiling, Matthew went back.

A moment later there in the doorway was that young, bright-eyed visitor with the smiling face and the hand out; and, opposite him the nervous, hesi-

tant host—if you can call him that—excited and confused, and certainly unfriendly.

“Yes, well—what is it?”

Boxrider, before answering, half turned, discovered as he had expected, that the Jew waited to overhear, watched Matthew carefully out of the room, and then, as carefully, closed the door.

“I dare say you think I’m officious,” he said, “but what I’ve got to say is private, sir.”

Beech began uncomfortably to pull a chair.

“Then you’d better sit down.”

“Well, yes,” said Boxrider coolly. “I think I’d better sit down.” He paused, looked round the office easily, and then, “I’ve got a proposition which I’m going to ask you to consider carefully. We’re both in the same line. We use the same address. But I’ve reached the point when I want to expand. I suggest that we don’t compete against one another. I suggest that we amalgamate!”

V

The condition of the mind of Beech when he sat listening to those short sentences, and when he heard uttered, in a tone appropriate rather to a comment on the weather than to an idea almost grotesquely revolutionary, the final proposition, must have been something worth diagnosing. This upstart, this nobody, this intruder, risen nobody knew where, with who knew what kind of a connexion, to come here

and think himself . . . etc., etc., etc. You can let your imagination range. There is nothing that he may not have thought with that dilated imagination of his, that quick febrile intelligence with its readiness to excitement. If the human psychology could be set to respond to a diagrammatic indicator, what prodigious divergences from the middle line the mind movements of Beech would have shown!

Of course, the idea was impossible, preposterous, unheard of; every cliché in the vocabulary of refusal must have been taken out and used. But an original mind welcomes refusals and objections, as the tramp the familiar difficulties of the road. They must have talked for an hour, the three clerks listening all the time to remote murmurs, listening and hoping for a bell to ring.

“What’s it all about?” Bexley whispered to James.

“Don’t know. But that young Boxrider chap’ll turn *’im* inside out if *’e* wants to.”

Bexley grinned. “That wouldn’t be very hard.”

“No, you’re right. *’E* is a boss to *’ave*, isn’t *’e*? ”

They both smirked—James in the rather unclean way of his mind. They usually smirked when they talked of Beech.

And in the meantime the pair within talked. Whether Beech believed in modern miracles, I do not know; but that he could only explain the result of that talk in terms of miracle, I’m pretty sure. He was bemused for days after, thinking about it.

For what happened was this: he agreed. He (Beech), with a business twenty years old behind his back, agreed to make partner in equality with himself a boy, a vulgar youth of whom he knew nothing and for whom he cared less—and agreed without even bargaining for time to consider. The thing to him was utterly inexplicable. There he had been sitting armed against this intruder, and within five minutes of Boxrider's advancing his first proposition, he (Beech) was listening even eagerly! Yes, that would be sound; and that would be good. The idea that two heads are better, etc., was too obvious to be controverted; and of course it would promote further business if, etc. You can see the thing which Boxrider would serve up. And Boxrider could be unctuous enough when he chose.

All the same, when Boxrider had got away with a signed agreement in his pocket on which to base the deed of partnership, Beech, lying back in his chair, the better to sustain himself against the wave of reaction which must now sweep over him, discovered that he was involved in a mere confusion rather than in a sense of distaste. And later, when he had had time to reflect, he remembered certain things—particularly that business *was* leaving him. Well, this Boxrider should help to hold what they had. He had never got any new business—he had hated the character of the work too much. Boxrider would get new business. Finally, Boxrider could be “turned on” to deal with the staff.

This last reflection gave his mind immense ease,

and he remembered with sudden satisfaction a picture the new partner had drawn.

“You’ll be able to give less attention to the office. I should think that a man with your education and so on would like more time for your books and things.”

He smiled to himself; to have the money and yet not have to do the filthy work! And it really was very discerning of Boxrider to see so clearly that he (Beech) was different from the type of men ordinarily to be found in this so-called “profession.”

Fortified by this reflection, Beech at this time really was ready to approve Boxrider and to be content with what seemed to be promised!

And Boxrider after this *coup d'état*? That signed half-sheet of note-paper embodying briefly the terms of the settlement indicates something. He had known very little about Beech—which fact only goes the better to point his shrewdness. A nervous, conscientious man, a man who would hold to what he had undertaken—set his hand to. That was his conclusion. Get Beech to sign, and even if the paper could be repudiated, even if it did not constitute a regular agreement, it would be allowed to stand. All the same, if the bargain was a good one for himself, it was, he was quite sure, a better one for Beech. He intended that Beech should discover it to be so. He had precise notions, one gathers, about many things. He had a precise notion of the duty of a partner. He would do very well by Beech.

It was arranged that Boxrider should come into the Beech office at once, and there next morning he was. The staff surveyed him in astonishment. Beech had not then arrived.

The Jew came forward, and there was fresh astonishment to see that young man who had called and taken so long about it the day before cross the office and make for the principal's room.

"He's not come yet. You'll have to wait." The Jew had tried silently to intervene, but it was Bexley who had spoken.

"What?" said Boxrider, stopping suddenly. "You don't mean Mr. Beech hasn't told you?"

"Told us?" James, turning suddenly on his stool, contributed to the incident for the first time. He was heavily and lazily contemptuous, as he always was. "Told us?" and then with a little flush and a kind of surprise, "What has Mr. Beech to tell us, if it isn't asking?"

"It *is* asking. And you'd better ask differently another time," said Boxrider sharply. "But since you don't know—your chief has got a partner and you've got a new chief."

He eyed James shrewdly as he spoke, and knew at once what he had been ready to suspect—that the clerk's outlook was seriously disturbed. ("Thought he'd bully Beech into giving *him* a partnership some day.")

But, as Boxrider reflected, there was likely to be a good deal of disturbance—and not only in the mind of James: his partner himself had probably had only

the first of a series of shocks. He meant to do well by Beech, but there must inevitably be certain disturbances.

Immediately to be considered was this failure on the part of Beech to tell the staff. It argued something surely, and not only irresolution in the master. Part of the explanation seemed apparent before the master's arrival. And, indeed, he passed over the incident lightly enough when Beech stumbled in upon him in the private office.

"I introduced myself—since you weren't here to do it."

"Oh, yes! 'Fraid I forgot—omitted to tell them yesterday."

Boxrider watched the face of the man delivering the explanation, nodded, and turned to his work. But later in the day he contrived to murmur:

"By the way, Beech"—he had been resolved to drop the honorific from the beginning; he did not know how Beech would like it, but it had got to be—"by the way, as I'm junior pard I think I ought to run the staff, eh?"

Beech looked up. He didn't want to show his relief too clearly. And he turned, in his irritable way, for a moment apparently considering.

"Well—perhaps. Yes, I think you might do that, Boxrider, coming to me only when you are in difficulties."

Boxrider did not laugh. But during the next few days he kept his eyes very wide open. He had decided to begin with Bexley. Bexley, he discovered,

used to disappear at ten on account collecting. He also discovered that the accounts to be collected were unfortunately not numerous enough to require an hour of concentrated effort. And one morning within a week, his partner not having arrived, he rang the bell.

“Tell Bexley.”

“Now then, Bexley, about those accounts.”

“Yes.”

Boxrider looked up quickly. “It’s ‘sir’ when you’re talking to me, Bexley. Got that?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Now we’ll get on with it. You go out collecting accounts each morning at ten. You’re back here at eleven-thirty?”

“But I’ve always had the morning.”

“You’ll get a lifetime as far as I’m concerned if you give me any more of your back chat.”

“Mr. Beech—sir——”

“I know all about Mr. Beech. I’m junior partner here, and as such it’s my job to run the staff. I’m doing it at Mr. Beech’s desire. Not that,” reflectively, “now I come to think of it, I need explain to anyone of *your* kind. Only as I don’t know that you’d get a job elsewhere——”

“Oh, yes, I would, sir!”

“Very well. One month from to-day. That’ll do now. You can cut.”

Later in the day, though, there was a sequel.

“I beg your pardon, sir.” It was a hesitating Bexley who stood in the doorway.

“Yes?” sharply from Boxrider. “Knock when you come in here again.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, what is it now?”

“I wondered, sir, if you’d let me withdraw my notice.”

“*Your* notice? You didn’t *give* it—you got it, my friend.”

Bexley was getting confused.

“I mean that, sir. If you’d let it be as it was.”

“You want to stay?”

“Yes, sir.”

“On my terms?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You’ve spat up all that rot about what you used to do and so on?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, I don’t know that I’m justified. But I’ll give you one more chance.”

“Thank you very much, sir.”

Bexley began to withdraw when suddenly he heard himself called back. Boxrider was studying him curiously.

“I suppose it’s a girl, eh?”

“Well, yes, sir. If I lost my job——”

“Want to get married, eh?”

“Yes, sir.”

“How much has Mr. Beech been paying you?”

“Forty-five six and a small commission.”

“I see.” For a moment he considered. “Well, look here, Bexley. I don’t know that I’m right in

'doing so after your rank idiocy. But we'll make it sixty-five as long as you're here. But remember you're here on trial."

"Yes, sir. Thank you very much indeed, sir."

"I've got *him*," was how the new partner put it to himself then. But there was the rest of the staff to deal with. He had been watching Matthew, and when that youth came into the inner office one morning he put down his pen and looking up met Matthew's smiling eye.

"Look here, Matthew. I suppose you can't help that grin."

"I'm not grinning, sir."

"Well, perhaps you don't call it a grin. But I do, and if you can't wash it off, you'll have to quit—that's all."

Matthew nodded and—grinned.

Next morning when Bexley appeared he learnt that Matthew had left and wasn't coming back.

VI

But there was still James. Boxrider began to watch James. To himself James paid an obscure kind of deference; Beech the clerk ignored. Apparently he had made up his mind years before about the son of his first employer. Young Beech simply did not count. (He had been "young" Beech then.)

Coming in one day suddenly Boxrider overheard the end of a conversation. Beech was sitting at the desk nervously fingering a paper-knife and looking

the complete culprit, while his middle-aged clerk lounged easily, hands in pockets.

“I wish—I wish you could sometimes be in in the morning when I want you, Mr. James.”

Boxrider had an idea that Beech had been screwing himself up for the encounter all the day before.

“I wasn’t aware I was wanted,” said James slowly. “I get the work done, and I suppose that’s all that’s required.”

“Well, please try—to be in oftener. I might want you as I did to-day.”

“Oh, well, right-o!” The heavy clerk lounged up as Boxrider entered.

Boxrider said nothing to his partner, but next morning he was down early—at 9 o’clock, in fact. At 9.5 he rang the bell.

“Bexley, tell Mr. James I want him.”

“He’s not here yet, sir.”

“Oh! Tell him I want him as soon as he arrives.”

James turned up as usual about ten minutes to ten, and getting the message per Bexley strolled easily to the private office door. Boxrider rejoiced that his partner had not yet arrived. He meant to show James something.

“Oh, good morning, James!” James looked up. By a kind of unwritten understanding he had been “Mr. James” to Beech.

“Good morning,” he said slowly.

“I’ve something to say, James. Several things. The first is when you come in here in future I must ask you to knock.”

“No,” began James, “I’ve never had to do that. It’s understood.”

“Is it? Well, I’m afraid it isn’t any more. I’m in charge of the staff here now; I must really ask you to understand that. And there is another point. Not of supreme importance. But one that has its bearing on discipline. When you speak to me I wish you to say ‘sir.’”

“I——”

“It isn’t a point to discuss. You understand my wish?” The room vibrated with his energy.

“Well, yes, I understand you.”

“That’s all right,” said Boxrider coolly. “Now we’ll get on. I’m going to keep a book. It is my wish that you sign on every morning at 9 o’clock.”

A flush was coming into James’ cheek. “What’s that mean? What’s that for?”

“Because I find you’re not to be trusted, James. You come in here at 10 o’clock, though you’re paid to be here at 9.”

“Suppose I say I don’t like that idea of a book—that I couldn’t begin.”

“Oh,” answered Boxrider mildly, “then you wouldn’t get the chance to begin! I should hate to do it. You’ve been here a long time. But somebody’s got to be in command, and if you couldn’t agree to obey orders, I don’t see any other course open than to ask you to take the usual month’s notice.”

“You mean you’d try to send me off?”

“Try?” repeated Boxrider smiling. “Look here,

James. I might say, 'Don't you talk about try or I will get your notice now.' But I won't say that. I'll just point out to you that you haven't quite done things on the square, and that I think you might consider whether, seeing that you are senior, you couldn't set a better example."

James frowned, then smiled. He had already mistaken the intent of Boxrider's studied mildness. His manner continued easy. "I shall see Mr. Beech about this," he said. Suddenly Boxrider stiffened, though he retained his control of the situation.

"I don't think I'd worry Mr. Beech, if I were you. You see, James," he said, very slowly, "it would be *me* you'd be under afterwards. And, seriously, I *don't* recommend you to oppose me."

He paused and smiled again, and James nodded.

Suddenly his manner changed; he grew submissive.

"Very well, sir. I'll see to the book. Is there anything else?"

There may have been a carefully veiled irony in that inquiry; if there was Boxrider chose to ignore it.

The man went back to the outer office. But reaching his desk he seemed to do no work, and Bexley, contriving a glance over in his direction, saw that the veins on his big forehead were swollen.

Left alone, Boxrider drew a long breath. An unpleasant job had been done. A drastic operation had had to be performed, and it had now been performed. No longer would Beech be the object of overt and petty insult.

CHAPTER V

I

THE “Woman’s Reform Club” was, in those days, situated high up in a building off the Strand—a club with a vague title to its name, but where professional women talked good trades-unionism and where visitors from outside (there were a number here to-night) looked about them with a naïve expectation which was flattering enough to the objects of it.

People began to float in from the dining-room, carrying the chairs they had sat in to dine, because what chairs were available in the big room were already filled. Three women to one man, and all lumbering in with chairs. And when all were settled, or nearly so, in long uneven lines of evening toilets, there is a flutter, a small woman in black leads the way in, and following her comes that celebrity of our own time, Coleton—Claude Coleton—the Coleton as one might say. A tall, extraordinarily handsome person, with that proper economy of feature which nature practises in her best work. A smallish, well-set head with the dark hair brushed back, a quick, intrusive eye—you couldn’t deny *that*—and about the lips what might have seemed to one looking very closely and instructed to suspect, a carefully practised melancholy. A woman sitting in the front row

turned a head quickly: that sudden sound of an in-drawing of breath behind her had touched her curiosity; who *was* sitting there?

Why *that* pair! “How are you, Miss Senior, . . . Mrs. Graeme,” smiles, nods, the ordinary exchange; and the woman in the front row no longer seemed curious.

A well-contrasted pair, by the way, that. The “Miss Senior” a tall brown-haired young woman with quiet, steady grey eyes and round pale cheeks, and an air of eagerness struggling with a natural reticence, a girl with long brown fingers, the fingers of an artist: an *ingénue*, though a creature full of promise—promise waiting fulfilment, physical, spiritual. In grey—a grey indefinably appropriate, a veil obscurely seen to be proper to the character beyond. . . .

And the other of the pair, the blonde. Golden haired, with those deep blue eyes which turn grey when the skies of life turn. A woman with the creamy skin of her kind. . . . A person with atmosphere obviously, who might make circles and draw you within with a beckon of that small infinitely white hand. Just now a woman breathing rather hard once or twice. And in the meantime Coleton was being led upon the dais. Mrs. Trellfall, writer of distinguished essays, was murmuring welcome to the male celebrity—for there were plenty of the feminine kind here—in a tender, bell-like voice. They all knew his subject, and some of them approved his views—“with reservations.” There was

laughter to that. She did not need to remind them that the subject he had made his own was what might be called a Renaissance of Reticence—that reticence which was so finely characteristic of the national character.

“Mr. Coleton holds extreme views on what is called to-day, by people who seek, as he would say, to make a bad thing seem less bad, *Publicity*. I am old enough to remember a time when a person who used the Press to push himself. . . . Some of you perhaps would not go as far as Mr. Coleton in condemning all kinds of advertising. Frankly, if I must use the word, publicity may seem to some of us—a necessary thing . . .” and so forth.

Then a few words of welcome to the guest, and finally there, smiling and confident, stood Coleton. For the first time an observer might have qualified his earlier satisfaction in the fact of that economy of feature, that absence of over-emphasis, which he had first approved. Flung out the better to deliver the address, the man’s figure now seemed a degree or two fuller than was admirable, and the critical eye, still readjusting impressions, might have dwelt for a moment on the lips—seemingly very slightly more protuberant than one had believed before, redder, more moist. But a handsome figure . . . most handsome . . . and that dark eye . . . that melancholy air. . . .

And really not ungallant? Women’s eyes observed him, knowing him for the most generally attractive bachelor. . . . Oh, yes, certainly a bachelor! Nat-

urally there were names one heard. And stories. The effect was the more exciting. But in essence a gentleman of the old nobilities, a Galahad—gay, ready for admiration, but true to the fine reticence of another time. Of course there were things in his books—but then a man had to write of what he saw. . . .

Coleton was beginning with smiling challenges. There must be some of them who dissented from him, who felt towards him as the Stuarts did to the Puritans.

“I, ladies and gentlemen, am not ashamed to own myself, in these things, a Puritan.” There was laughter at this. Perhaps some remembered passages in that last book “*The Dream in the Desert.*”

“Take the publicity—I apologize, as our chairman did, for the word—the publicity of which members of my own profession seem to approve. Now, I hold that it is no more the business of the public to know a single detail of the life of a writer of the books it reads than it is to possess itself of information about the compositor who sets up the book. Some of you on the other hand will, I suppose, argue that this publicity is innocent, and that even if it is not innocent it is necessary. Your books are not read if your face, as seen in the ‘Illustrated,’ be not to be read also. Your work is unknown if your home-life is hidden.” Later came denunciation.

“What is this publicity? It is making ignoble and disgusting the noble profession of Literature. It is turning artists into quack-medicine men; it

takes a writer out of his study and sets him up in a soiled astrakhan coat and with sham diamond rings on his fingers in the market-place. If tea and cocoa and underclothing must be sold by piling up noise and display, I suppose I cannot hope to forbid it—though I should travel a long way to avoid this publicity, and I would very willingly see established for general use a pledge by which one abstained from purchasing any article the qualities of which were pressed upon one by blatant announcements, either on hoardings or in the Press. Commerce? I have no use for Commerce as that word is understood to-day. Why, I am told (with what degree of accuracy I don't know) that there are actually people—I use as charitable a term as I can—people who specialize in the hideous practice of this thing called Publicity, who set themselves to induce respectable old commercial houses to allow them to frame their appeals to the public. I don't know from what class these lowly individuals actually spring, and I confess that I prefer to remain ignorant. But I invite you to contemplate a condition of things when men can set out deliberately to increase the blatancy and vulgarity of an already sufficiently blatant and vulgar civilization.

“I have even heard, ladies and gentlemen—though here I remain sceptical, if only in the interests of my own satisfaction in my kind—that these publicity dealers have actually succeeded in establishing relations with persons of our profession. I am glad to see that some of you shudder. It is a thing to shud-

der at. That there are writers who present and even promote the paragraph and the puff" . . . etc. . . . and much more of the same kind.

When he had thanked them for their indulgent reception of his advocacy of what he feared was an old-fashioned prejudice, he followed his chair-lady, as he had taken occasion "humorously" to call her, into the throng and there permitted himself to be surrounded.

"I do thank you, Mr. Coleton; you said exactly what ought to be said," murmured a large blonde woman, who to speak to him had to desert her little court of young smiling men, "*exactly* what ought to be said, in the ears even of"—the voice was now carefully modulated—"of some people who are here to-night."

Coleton looked into her eyes with a profound air of comprehension and—slid away into the throng. Another and another spoke to him, but his movement was definitely towards the door. And yet conceivably—as indeed one or two observant minds decided—the purpose was *not* escape. Near to the door stood (waited?) among others the pair to whom he came at last as if with some purpose.

"How are you, Mrs. Graeme? . . ." It was like putting a match to dry gorse. Waiting? Of course she had been waiting. He held her hand in the manner doubtless approved by himself—that little, soft, thrilling hand; and then he turned to Lesley Senior, who was in the mid-career of her congratulations.

"Your help," he said softly—he could emotional-

ize such a minor occasion as the present—"and you were *all* helping me who shared my feelings; merely by sitting there and thinking *with* me; your help was—wonderful." He could use these little pitched-up softnesses matchlessly. The eyes of the young woman responded—glowed; his words came again. But a quiet observer behind them there in the crowd may have discovered, in the eyes of the other woman, a lifting intolerance of the ingenuously worded compliment. Experience, contemptuous in its own security—or almost security.

His air was one of a special tenderness to the *ingénue*, indicative of his real mind being elsewhere, though not far away. So read one of that pair of hearers.

"I think my campaign *is* making headway—if campaign is not too little modest a word.

"I am sure of it, Mr. Coleton. You will yet put out the sky signs of these dreadful people. Perhaps some day you'll even succeed in making all advertising a crime against the State, as at present it is a blot upon art and beauty."

"But surely," suggested a pinched voice from behind, the pinched voice coming forth from the shrivelled lips of a little sallow woman in unbecoming pink, "but surely, Mr. Coleton, you allow your publisher to advertise your books?"

He rubbed his hands and smiled. "Ah, my dear Miss Tinkler, I'm afraid I've no choice. The good man reserves to himself the right to do whatever he chooses in order to sell his wares. And as I cannot

live on air—even the air that blows across the Thames to-night—I have to go on allowing my work to be his wares. But I would certainly rejoice to see a day when the mere bald announcement of a book, with no qualification of carefully selected praise, would be the sole form in which any self-respecting writer should advance his claim to public attention.”

“I quite agree,” burst in Lesley impetuously. “I think all advertising—I don’t care of what—tea, coffee, books, or pictures—is horrible. And I’m very glad that my views have a champion.”

“Ah, but the champion would in any case be forthcoming, once your views were expressed!”

She looked at him with bright eyes and a little flush; she was probably extraordinarily flattered, for remember what Coleton was—a name which counted so powerfully. (Have you ever seen the queue at Mudie’s the morning after his new book comes out!) Here was a man with friends all over the town, whose afternoon could be a progress from drawing-room to drawing-room; and this man had leisure to concentrate upon *her*, a will to individualize *her*. She answered him gaily, unaware, in her young excitement, of the eyes—mocking, contemptuous—of another woman who was secure in a hidden, precious reality of her own.

“Then, if you offer to be my Galahad, Mr. Coleton, I’ll bind on your arm a sign for an injunction to go on and utterly destroy this dragon of advertising.”

“If you really will help me to put these people to flight,” continued Coleton, “I shall feel that you

have proved yourself an ally as well as an inspiration."

Lesley's eyes, still bright, smiled at him again. But at this point Netta Graeme made her move towards the cloak-room.

"I'll get you a taxi," he murmured. The room heard. Mrs. Graeme smiled round upon them as she retreated. The distinguished Claude Coleton was to go into the night and whistle for her taxi. . . . And presently they were darting into the wet, shining street towards a *thump-thumping* car, and he was opening the door. He must hold their hands—Lesley's first; then, in the darkness at the door, Mrs. Graeme's.

As the car grunted and then ran suddenly, smoothly up the street, Netta leant back with a little sigh of content, her eyes bright.

But if anyone had cared to look in when next the car came under the light of an arc-lamp he would perhaps have said that the eyes of both women were bright.

II

Lesley leant back in her corner and drew a long breath.

"He was very—"

"Devoted?"

"Of course I didn't intend that," Lesley flashed out. "You know what I meant. I was speaking of the address."

"And thinking of—"

“Don’t be absurd, Netta. The man’s delivery was very good. I select that word carefully from my incomparable range of adjectives. His speech—I mean his way of putting it forth—suggested glitter and——”

“All that glitters is not gold,” murmured Netta Graeme.

“I believe for some extraordinary reason you dislike him.”

“You believe that, do you?”

Mrs. Graeme had her head set well back and her voice came evenly in answer. Oddly enough she stroked her own small right hand with her left, as though one served the other—did obeisance because some obscurely won but indubitable honour had come its way.

“Yes,” the girl persisted. “You said you’d come to-night to please me, but that if you were consulting your own feelings you would have kept away.”

“And from that you deduce dislike?”

“What else? If you didn’t dislike him you’d have been perfectly willing to go.”

“Well, and suppose I do not like to see a man being spoon-fed with adulation—the sugar-and-creamy adulation they mix specially at the Woman’s Reform for the men they get there——”

“There wasn’t much of it. You can’t get a really big man and not pay him a few silly little compliments, I suppose.”

“Apparently not.”

“And yet how unimportant all these little speeches

seemed when he spoke, when he really got going. Of course we expect a great deal now, and I really believe I could never read him again if, anywhere, I came across an interview with him."

"I, my dear, shall continue not to be influenced in the smallest degree in my reading by *anything* I heard, whether to-night or at any other time. As a matter of fact, I am not at all sure that I agree with Claude Coleton. Why should one not be advertised and use advertisements? If I hadn't just enough to save me from having to put up a sign in Bond Street, and I had to turn to earn a living, *I'd* be advertising. Of course I would. And you may be doing it before long."

"Never!"

"But an artist just as much as a writer has got to do it! Sooner or later. I'm not sure indeed if *I had* to make a living I wouldn't do it by making up advertisements myself! And you should illustrate them."

"What a perfectly hideous idea." The girl laughed, but there was a remote echo of some essential distaste—a kind of young shrinking of the artist in her from something crude.

In her own room in the flat which for two years she had shared with Netta Graeme, she found herself glowing with impressions of that evening—of that man's air as he had stood there giving them an ideal—for that, in these harsh days, was what the tender thing could be called; of his eye upon her corner; how often it had found its way there—she

tried to count . . . and then his coming to her . . . speaking to her, individualizing her. Finally, that courtly special tenderness of the safe conduct to the cab!

Men? She'd never had time to sort out her impressions of men. Even now in relation to this man she could not discover herself. She was excited, flattered certainly . . . there was that word one used —book-writers used it: intrigued.

But she was still young enough—and some odd, detached self in her recognized while itself hastening on towards a position of old age, or at least some ground from which it could look back and patronize —she was still young enough to be moved by the exposition of an ideal, and there was that ideal preserved by this distinguished man—this man whom the world agreed to admire. He must know what might be his by holding out a hand; and he forbore to hold it.

It was the gesture of aloofness, of freedom from the common appetite for fame which had first caught her; and then the direction of all that he signified—reputation, grace of utterance, ease of manner, and a subtle personal distinction—the direction of all that, as it had seemed, towards herself. She felt even now a little overwhelmed. She wondered if and when she would see him again.

She began, as a woman must do, to consider him now a little more in detail; and she was, as she told herself, still satisfied. He met all her demands unless there was . . . what was it? She could only hesitate

at this point, hesitate on the brink of a decision . . . "a certain softness." She withheld the idea strenuously. He had presented her with an ideal. That mean little criticism should not invade. . . . More strenuously she withheld it. Softness of gesture . . . softness of—

How subtly the idea, the general atmosphere of suggestion of that thing seemed to come about her. She beat wildly with some spiritual flail to dissipate the clinging, amorphous thing. . . . Softness—or an absence of hardness in the quality of the thinking . . . an over-intellectualized character of speech . . . a something which responded to the softness about him. Wilful adaptation to surrounding circumstances? Conceivably. And with that explanation eagerly accepted and thrust into service at once, she found herself reacting to her doubt, reconquering for him the ground within herself; and in doing so she was astonished to discover how much easier reconquest was than she could have expected. The ground was already half yielded . . . for, you see, the gentleman really *had* made an impression. . . . That doubt ran away at once—ran, you might say, for its life.

It might—who knew?—some day be heard of again.

In the meantime there abode this idea that the distinguished Claude Coleton had paid her attention, and that this first emotional thrill might be the first of many. For, obviously, it was towards herself that he had set his being that night.

And in the next room to hers lay, thinking, another woman—thinking that same thought of that same man in terms, though, of a relation to herself. Once she thought, with a smiling amusement that was free from malice, though it had in it something of pity, of Lesley. . . . For poor little Lesley, with her inexperience, believed . . . it was clear from her eyes as he had approached that she believed . . . and yet the truth had been so transparent.

In the darkness she drew the soft small right hand from under the bedclothes so that she might lift it to her lips again.

CHAPTER VI

I

IN the life history of every man there are *Dates*. Well here is a date in the life of this man—this Boxrider.

There had been a kind of understanding—a sort of concession to the susceptibilities of the senior partner—that such connexions as Beech brought into the service of the union remained in his own hands. Probably if Boxrider had been examined on the point he would have told you that he had not minded, that it was a temporary arrangement only, and that he merely meant to wait for a proper occasion before taking in hand the development of the Kingford, the “Tranquillity” underwear, and the other connexions which Beech had inherited from his father. As to Beech, Boxrider was always seeking for a clue.

One day he had said, looking up at a portrait over the fire-grate, “You know, Beech, I admire your old man. He must have been the real thing.”

“Very good of you,” says Beech primly, in his best minor-public school manner.

Boxrider looked at him curiously. “It isn’t good of me; it’s a natural remark. He knew his job! Inside out he knew it. It’s a pity you couldn’t hang on to what he left you in the way of connexions.”

“If I had *done*”—Beech looked up with quick fury—“if I *had* done, I’d have no occasion for a partner to sit in my room and put me right all day.”

Beech spent half his time now demanding of himself to know by what kind of possession he had been caught when he let Boxrider into his office. He had begun to notice things: I mean minor things. I will come later to a major matter.

But such minor points as these: people came to the office with commissions—small commissions many of them—but business was flowing in. He was glad to see that; of course, he told himself, he was delighted—he was not *quite* a fool. But in that last declaration he may conceivably have been wrong. He wanted business for the sake of the income it provided. But he hated the means by which the end was attained. The practice of his “profession”—as in moments of self-despite, he still loved to call it—was not less vulgar since he had had Boxrider to help him. But he was not sickened only by the business: he had begun to turn away from the thought that the business grew because Boxrider conducted it. . . . And then there was the staff. Boxrider had done something there. Their manner had changed completely. Even when they showed an unwonted deference he was always being involved in an emotional dilemma—whether to repudiate the new conditions in view of the circumstances in which they had arisen, or simply to accept and enjoy them.

The reason for the change? The reason for all the changes was the same—*Boxrider*.

II

All the same, Boxrider, in his own mental statement of the case, did not mean to leave Beech to muddle away the Kingford connexion. More than for any other reason he had joined with Beech to get that business; he was going to get it. But he was waiting. He wanted something really of the first quality. Kingfords knew, of course, he had joined the firm, but he had no hope at all that that fact would have impressed them favourably. "Anybody Beech would take on would be sure to be—another Beech."

He meant to come in on Kingfords suddenly. But it was Boxrider's principle that you did not "walk in on a man with a proposition"—he was, we have to own it, given to this transatlantic argot—"unless you'd got the whole thing worked out: unless you'd something to offer which he could see—something you could hold right under his nose."

Well, as he would tell you now, the best way to study Publicity is to keep in the streets. "After all," he would say often, when, considerably more established than at this stage, he allowed himself the indulgence of appropriate attitudes, "what is Publicity? Getting the Public. And where's the Public?"—he would throw an arm towards a thoroughfare—"where, if not *there?*"

He went out, that noticeably energetic figure of his moving easily, the head, as ever, pushed a little

forward—a gesture that was a symbol. The mind must be in front of the body, for the thought must work ahead of this physical London.

He crossed New Bridge Street and entered Fleet Street. His reflections were not cheerful to-day. There were people who would tell him he had done well. But he would not agree. He had worked two “stunts.” But the cash rewards had only been moderate. Not that that worried him; what was wrong was this, that of those two businesses neither was likely to do much for him in the future. Their custom had not the quality of continuity. Six months hence Barberry, of “Links with Learning,” might send for him again and pay him twenty pounds to design another page; or the Chair people might hand him a little ten-pound job.

But what more could he expect? Now, if they had been a cocoa, or a pill, or an underwear. . . .

Fleet Street. . . . He had no use for Fleet Street . . . and yet he was not sure; and that reminded him: he must get Kelly to put him up for the “Proposition Club.” Clubs could be made useful and the “Proposition” included everybody who dealt in the thing whose name this club bore. And pushing up beyond the head of Fleet Street it was now at length that he came to the Hoarding. There it rose, a symbol, if you liked, of progress, certainly of commercial energy, upon the ruins of a coarse, stupid civilization—the civilization of a so-called Bohemia beloved of moderately successful elderly men with thirsts and long memories—the civilization

of the fallen Holywell Street. A significant thing that hoarding—that giant symbol of an impatience with an undistinguished past.

He looked up with little notion, perhaps, of the relevance of the very thing to his own concerns. Symbol. Yes, but as yet symbol of no more than a commercial intelligence. It still hid its intent to take a part in affairs of the spirit. Certainly he had no suspicion. For looking up, his thoughts were of the things he saw—the advertisements hanging there.

What a rotten bill that was of “Tip-Top Tea”—would not pull a single buyer: involved; and feeble. A breakfast table group of the conventional type—father, mother, son, daughter (there is apparently a Malthus presiding over the inspirations of advertisement designs, who keeps a jealous eye on the limitation of families). The ill-drawn and vacuous young man (the mere cut of whose clothes suggested that he could not afford to buy good tea seeing that he was forced to go to a slop-shop for his dress)—this young man appeared to be observing that “‘Tip-Top Tea’ keeps out colds.” But there was no certainty that it *was* he who was saying it; and yet if he was not saying it, how did the picture illustrate the legend? And even if he *was* saying it, what was there in the picture to prove his statement?

And then there was “Tranquillity” underwear. (*They had* been clients of old Beech and still gave the firm a little provincial work.) “It warms the cockles of your heart.” Was it possible to use the

English language at all and be more inane? Where was the point? But he could guess the circumstances of the birth of the silly legend.

One of those clever young men who wrote advertisements in his spare time, who had perhaps won a prize for “the best suggestion” advertising “Tranquillity” underwear, would have written it out and sent it in, and a dull, middle-aged man in charge of the hoarding advertisement side would be vaguely reminded of some phrase of his remote and cherished youth. He would not ask himself what was the good of something which warmed the cockles of your heart (whatever the cockles might be) if it did not keep your back warm. But the motto was merely silly—inconceivably silly; what was worse was the claim added that “‘Tranquillity’ underwear never wears out.” That was a lie; and an obvious lie—as this was—always irritated the public who was supposed to be attracted.

Boxrider was no stern moralist; he would have told you flatly he was not. But he subscribed cheerfully to an edited counsel of his forefathers and held that honesty, if not an anxious honesty, was the best policy. Boxrider’s almost glaring honesty of purpose is a thing to note by the way, and to remember. He did not like the word “policy.” I suppose he would have been honest if it had been politic to be dishonest. Only he never was able to envisage circumstances where dishonesty could be business. He had taken stock of other men. There was Letherhead, for instance, who was running a certain

“Quick Fact-Finding Encyclopædia.” Well, an encyclopædia once unloaded on the public left you all right—there was no more to be said. You might tell your public that the work answered every question and provided the latest knowledge, and you could suppress the inconvenient addenda that the maps were all out of date and that the history took no account of the last war. You would not be having another encyclopædia to offer. “Only,” said Box-rider, “even that’s bad business. Suppose you’ve sold every copy before you’re found out, it’s bad business. If you satisfy your public, if you give them confidence, you’re allaying suspicion, and if you allay suspicion you’re helping to put money into circulation. Now, Letherhead, you’ve sold your rotten encyclopædia, we’ll say—though it’s assumption merely, and, I for one, will take leave to doubt that you will sell the thing: you’ll be found out before that—still we’ll say you’ve sold it. You’ve got so much money for it and you want to make a financial move. You buy a paper mill or a printing works, say, and put it on the market. And the public fights shy. I don’t mean because they know you’re connected with it. The thing goes deeper than that. They merely feel involved in an atmosphere of suspicion. They have no confidence in anything. And you’re the maker of that suspicion. . . . No, my son, clean business is always good business.”

When it came to the case of a food or an undergarment the argument was more emphatic. The people who bought it from you to-day would have consumed

the food by next week, and worn out the undergarment by next year; and well, then, they would want fresh supplies. Were they to come back to you?

Tell the truth. But, as a postscript his mind added, looking at that inanity on the hoarding, tell it clearly and attractively.

And now, finally, on that hoarding there was Kingford's Cocoa, with its inconceivably fatuous legend, "Kingford's Cocoa—Have you Tried It?"

No, of course I have not—why should I? was the natural comment after reading that unarresting inquiry. The kind of thing Beech had been turning out for them, though he sometimes put forth efforts that were worse—out-of-date phrases current in the days of his father, who had presumably attached them to the specific: "The man who broke the bank did it merely to buy Kingford's, which you can get for one shilling and threepence"; or "It was the absent-minded beggar who went without his Kingford's." . . . What appeal had those dead words to the public to-day? Young Boxrider, I believe, often spent a good many hours reading and subjecting to a critical eye these appeals to public attention. Detaching himself now from the allurement of the hoarding he set off westward. But, moving on, he found himself going back in thought to the Strand and to that great board with its attempt to catch a passing and more or less indifferent public.

The fact that, from the hoarding, he turned and walked west is really immensely important.

Here, then, we have Boxrider on his way west on this day of significance to himself, and therefore, necessarily, to others. He took the direction from no conscious design. He walked, as he usually did, with an eager eye that dived into faces—women's faces mostly, because women were still a challenging mystery.

He crossed the Strand and Charing Cross and loitered through the plateau of Trafalgar Square. Suddenly he stopped, his breath coming and going, his eyes shining as at a vision. And his eye was on Nelson high up there. . . . Yes, there was no doubt. . . . Perhaps Boxrider translated everything in terms of his job. But that column now: *there* was an advertisement: an advertisement, if ever there was one, of England's greatness and achievement at sea. And—yes—business still carried on at Admiralty Buildings opposite.

In the Haymarket he stopped to look into Turnery's window. *There*, again, was something to be proud of: a raincoat that had ceased to be a patent article and become a word in the language. If it was wet you put on your Turnery. Turnery is a garment to keep out the rain. No longer is it the name of the maker of a garment to keep out the rain. Again that odd half-choking thrill. There was something that had been made: that idea—that created thing, the genius of Publicity—occupied him; he could have called out.

Art—what is Art? Who reserved the thrill and passion of Art for men with colours and men with pens?

But now comes a moment of real drama. At Swan & Edgar's he hesitated. He might have lounged off into Regent Street. That colonnade caught his eye, as it catches the eye of men and women every minute of the day, touching them by its sweep and dignity and odd promise of something.

If he had gone that way—I do not know—there would certainly be a story to tell; because the life of each one of us is compounded of so much mystery and grandeur that inevitably thereby hangs a tale. There would be a story; but not *this* story.

But into Piccadilly he turned, all ignorant that he was stepping into the lives of others, and carrying himself into the presence of realities of which his heart still suspected nothing.

He was still in Piccadilly, and just before him now rose the high and sombre square of Burlington House. He caught at once an impression of well-dressed crowds, and there before him was explanation enough. “Royal Academy—Spring Exhibition,” he read.

For a whole minute he hesitated. Then, perhaps dimly aware of some mysterious beckoning of Fate, perhaps moved merely by one of those obscure impulses to a gaiety that shall contrast with the heaviness of one's thought, as though one were suddenly presented with a psychic galvanometer wherewith to excite oneself to a quicker spiritual movement,

that man went in, paid his shilling, bought his Fate if you like, and a moment later was in the middle of an idling, slow-moving, quick-talking crowd of women in soft silks, men in town clothes. This was an early crowd; there were people here whom one ought to know; the show had not yet been abandoned by Society. So that Hornsey in georgette blouse and tweed skirt, and Leytonstone in pink and glorious head-covering mingled with the soft tones of Berkeley Square and the smart little toques of Sloane Street.

He liked seeing these crowds. There were the people whom, ultimately, he had got to understand. These were the folk it was his business to convince. He did not go to them directly; but *almost* directly, he did. He did not stop the Duchess of Pastures and say, “Madam, what you want, what you’ve always wanted for that admirable family of yours, is ‘Kingford’s Cocoa.’” But he did stop her when she next opened her “Sport and Society” with just that reminder. And these people from the suburbs—he did not trot them off each one in turn to the refreshment room and stand them a “Tip-Top Tea,” in the meantime exhorting them to empty through their windows all other kinds and drink only “Tip-Top” for the future. But next time they passed the hoarding which filled up the empty space at their street corner—if he got his way—he would be there with a big picture of “Tip-Top”; and if he had the matter in hand, the picture would be something better than that unspeakably fatuous family group with

its imbecile legend about the tea “that keeps out cold.”

His mind reverted to “Kingford’s Cocoa.” These were the people who ought all to be swallowing “Kingford’s Cocoa.” All these women who were married (and you could easily guess which of them were) ought to be buying Kingford’s for their miserable kind. Ought to? *Should!* *Must!*

I believe that that sudden determination came upon him precisely in the doorway of Room XI, into which, if you remember, you barge, if you are not careful, immediately after doing Room I, to the detriment of the good order of a mind intent on the official catalogue. There is something to be considered in the fact that this resolve should be excited so powerfully and with such swiftness as he stood in the doorway; for his mind immediately demanded “How”—How to make these women think about Kingfords—buy Kingfords. And having made that demand he found answer opposite.

He knew at once. He always knew. It was part of that genius of his to know. There it was—that picture of the very young woman radiant with spring; that portrait, if it was a portrait. The girl was seen, diaphanously draped, in a green meadow on which her pale feet glinted. Her head was raised and half turned, as if in contemplation. You were, you felt, supposed to understand from the shy, hopeful, ingenuous curiosity of the eyes that there was a lover somewhere in behind those sombre shadowed trees in the remote distance.

It was an astonishingly vivid piece of work, a canvas in which the figure really lived. It made the faces on either side look dull, unreal. But it was those half-opened red lips that caught his mind, made his breath come so quickly.

He looked down at the title.

“Waiting!”

An elderly woman in rich black started a little and blinked like a sheep in pasture disturbed by a golf ball as she heard the crack of fist on hand. That strange-looking young man! Why did these people come? She hoped he was not mad; did not mean to commit suicide presently. She did so hate the sight of blood.

But our friend Boxrider did not know that such a woman had ever been sent into this world and entrusted with the responsibility of cherishing an immortal soul. He had one thought—a thought to disturb us rather seriously. But his thoughts are to disturb us a good deal.

“Waiting”—for her cup of Kingford’s. (An outrage? The mere projection of the thought an offence? In terms of these prejudices of ours—Yes. In terms of his—No.)

He turned to the catalogue again, this time for the name of the artist: “By Lesley Senior.”

Lesley! Lesley was a girl’s name. He remembered in one of those books he had borrowed from his old schoolmaster there had been a poem to a “Bonnie Lesley.” Well, it was rather a bore. He thought he could be interested in women, in their

proper place. But here? Besides you never knew with women.

But there, without the least particle of a doubt, was the picture that had been conceived, painted, and exhibited to one end. He had done with the rest of the show. He went at once in search of the department which dealt with proposals for purchase. He saw a blond, pale-haired, junior clerk, and this young man, rather astonished by the appearance of his visitor, who did not look like one of the picture-buying sort, raised his eyebrows.

“Were you inquiring for yourself, sir?”

“Certainly,” answered his visitor rather truculently, as the secretary thought. “I want the figure. I can sell that picture if the price is kept low.”

“Then you *are* acting for another?”

“If I pay you it doesn’t matter who I buy it for, does it?”

“Certainly not,” said the young man with a blandness which mingled with it a mild irony, “if you pay. Certainly not. The price of the picture is”—he turned up a book—“is seventy pounds.”

“Is it? I’ll give you fifty.”

“Oh, we don’t discuss prices here, sir! The price is fixed by the artist.”

“Oh, very well!” says our urgent friend, “I’ll see the artist.”

There was no doubt about it. That was what he would have to do. He had hoped to bargain with this Johnny at the desk. Boxrider had argued that the “Johnny” would be indifferent to the precise

price paid; the commission would not be very much, and rather than lose a customer for an obscure artist he would cave in. But now he would have to find the confounded woman, who it appeared lived in Chelsea—Riverside Flats. For a moment he was inclined to write: he knew very little about artists and he had a practical man's distrust of, and impatience with, what he conceived the type. But then he would get a silly feminine letter—the sort which people of that kind would write—"I'm afraid I can't alter my price." Yes, it would have to be a personal meeting.

He might as well get it over. He went out into Piccadilly, climbed on to the top of a bus, and while he was being conveyed southwards his quick eye was hard worked finding stations for that great new conception of his. Here was Piccadilly Circus. To anyone coming out of Piccadilly that picture "Waiting" must be there over on the edge of Shaftesbury Avenue somewhere; one could buy up a Shaftesbury Avenue stand fronting the Circus. And coming to Trafalgar Square and Nelson again; when he had really got working and had money flowing in he would be willing, he told himself half jestingly, to sink every penny to buy that column: Business—that *would* be business; that would hit the whole world in the eye.

And now, descending his bus at Westminster and waiting for a Chelsea-going one, he considered Big Ben. There were whimsical possibilities there. You could put up a disappearing sky-sign in place of, or immediately under or over, the clock face.

“Isn’t it time you had your cup of Kingford?” or “Eleven o’clock and now for ‘Tranquillity.’” He laughed. His joke really caught him and amused him.

But he would make Beech and Boxrider! He brought a fist down hard, and an elderly gentleman with an air of permanent and ineffectual protest against life jumped in his seat, hoping that this was not one of those labour leaders, who existed only to rob elderly gentlemen of the means by which they were able to preserve contact with other elderly gentlemen.

In Chelsea, Boxrider came off his bus and looked about him. With such a name Riverside Flats ought not to be hard to find. He walked out of King’s Road and towards the embankment, and at a corner on the river-side discovered the building he sought in a gaunt new red-brick-faced erection. He sighed. Probably, being a woman, she would live in a house where there would not be a lift; and being an artist she would have the flat at the top of the building. Also it would take ten minutes to discover if she lived in the place at all.

And now he got the first of three small shocks: for he found her name not on a high painted board but on the first door on which his eye alighted. He was sufficiently taken aback to stand hesitating like a man pulled up when in flight. Then he knocked. For a moment he could hear nothing, and he wondered if the place was empty. Then there came the sound of someone moving slowly within; he thought

afterwards that the impression he had had was of hearing the step of one who took easy, long strides, someone in a special sense, of leisure—who, even if working a sixteen-hour day, was still at leisure.

But that was a post-, not a pre-the-event impression, doubtless. It is so easy to restore a past in terms of a present; to believe we are only re-creating, when actually we are creating; to say we thought, when we should acknowledge that we think we thought!

. . . Unless of course . . . unless there are experiences too tremendous in their consequences to allow a mere trammel such as Time to check their force, and whose impetus is from the beginning so great as to override our earthly unities. A thing may be so big as to affect us profoundly though we may be unaware of the fact from the very beginning. . . .

Well, there is the choice of opinions. Afterwards, he had an idea of premonitions. But at that moment he was standing there before that door waiting, listening to a leisured movement along the passage within; and a moment later, observing, with the sudden energy of curiosity and dissatisfaction, the tall young woman with the grey eyes and an air of slow, perhaps assumed, astonishment, who stood in the doorway.

CHAPTER VII

I

So there you have that pair: perhaps the oddest conjunction of the sexes to be found at that moment in London.

“I wanted a Miss Senior.”

“I am a Miss Senior.” She seemed to think better of the jest, for she corrected herself, “I am Miss Senior.”

He had not missed the withdrawal of the indefinite article, but he was not sorry for that: he had no experience of women of this kind, but some odd, remote voice within him was saying that he did not want any tricks. He had a suspicion, too, that she was so far in sole possession of the situation. He must get a foot in, literally.

“May I have a few words with you then, please?” He was annoyed that she still hesitated. He wanted to see her stand aside and welcome him in. “It’s about a picture.”

She stood aside at once now. “Come in, please.” (Why couldn’t she have said that before?)

He found himself in a narrow, white-enameled passage dividing two small rooms from two others. There were pictures hanging on the wall—one only,

of four was in a frame. The picture in a frame was of a youngish man with what might be called a “modern” smile, and a face vaguely familiar. Had he seen it somewhere?

It was a picture which profoundly irritated the young man who now observed it. To Boxrider the whole experience was becoming a mere series of irritations; the flat, the circumstances in which he visited it, this portrait, all irritated; the woman herself irritated by what he characterized mentally as her insolent indifference—an indifference which refused to take account of him as a man, even as a human being, and that scarcely seemed to admit his reality as a means of exchanging money for her pictures.

In the meantime Lesley Senior was opening the door of a small sitting-room; and again he was not pleased. It was not his idea of comfort; it would not be any man’s: an oak wall, a Welsh dresser, an oak floor with only a couple of small Persian rugs, a couple of deep arm-chairs, and on the wall a glowing sunset in oils—a fantastic crudity for which he had no use. Coldness; discomfort. He had a notion that these artists had rooms of a mysterious character called “Studios.” He wanted to be shown into hers. He did not know that Lesley’s “studio” was the exiguous chamber which was all that Netta, who had apportioned the rooms, could allot to art; nor that to this little, undistinguished work-room visitors—even the most intimately known—were never brought.

In the meantime Lesley was addressing her caller.

“Won’t you sit down, Mr. ——?”

“Boxrider,” he hurried to explain—*unnecessarily* hurried, he afterwards told himself.

He sat down and looked at the long, slim brown fingers. “Twisted you round her little finger”: odd that that idea should come into his mind!

“And now?” She smiled saying that, and her face had a power of slow enchantment when she smiled.

“I came about that picture of yours in the Academy.”

“Oh, yes?” She ought to have started, flushed with pleasure. Wasn’t he the patron?

“I want to buy it.” Now he had proclaimed himself!

“It’s very good of you.”

“But I came to make an offer. I told the chap at the office and he referred me to you. I offer”—he was recovering quickly now, and she must have seen a change for she sat up, suddenly regarding him with a somewhat quickened curiosity. “I offer a firm fifty pounds.”

“I asked for seventy.” She spoke calmly in that strange, soft, low voice, giving an impression of ease (perhaps too great an ease for his approval).

“Yes, I know you did. But I offer fifty.”

“I think it’s worth seventy.”

“I dare say you do. You’re the seller. It’s your business to maintain your price if you can, only you can’t. There’s a slump in pictures. Many people—

even famous artists——” He stopped. That way of putting it was, he felt suddenly, inconceivably clumsy.

Of course she took her opportunity. “And I, *not* being a famous artist, ought to be glad to get fifty.”

“Well, that’s about it.” He snapped out the words, and she looked at him. She was beginning to forget the awkward manner and was finding herself aware of a sudden young crude power in this man. And she seems to have had this curious impulse, inexplicable to herself—an impulse rising from she knew not what infinitely remote centre of her being—an impulse to keep him like that—to keep him trading, arguing, chaffering. She had not expected to find a man; and here was a man, a disagreeably outlined man, but a man. It was not always given to a woman to find a clue so quickly. But she found it already infinitely precious, and as her active dislike grew, as it appears to have done, her desire to “make the creature” (her own mental phrase) talk characteristically, found her persisting in the character of merchant.

“Suppose I don’t choose to sell for less than my price?”

“I don’t think you’ll do that. You can’t keep up prices on a collapsing market.”

“Oh, but you don’t know what I can do, Mr. Box-rider! I don’t suppose you know very much about how hard an artist has to work before he has his picture ready. He’s got to buy all his colours and canvasses, pay for the hire and heating of a studio,

find himself in food and clothes while he's working, pay models if he uses them, and if he's doing landscapes pay railway fares to reach the places he wants to paint, and lodging charges after he gets there. And when he's worked for perhaps half a year, spending everything and risking everything; perhaps when he sends the picture up to the Academy they turn it down."

She spoke quite eloquently. He enjoyed, while he was irritated by the eloquence. He had an impulse to stimulate it. Each, it will be seen, was ready to stimulate the other.

"It all sounds very pathetic and moving and all that kind of thing," he said; "and I can see all that about working for a year and then being turned down. But you *weren't* turned down."

"No. Exactly. And as I wasn't, in view of all that had to be done to get in, don't you agree that I was very modest in my price?"

"No, I don't." There was some extraordinary undercurrent or a confluence of conflicting undercurrents here—something terrible with the terrible energy of youth.

"I don't," he repeated with a little frown, minatory as it seemed to her. "I think it was an arbitrary price. All prices for pictures are." Once he paused, perhaps to consider why he chose to fight so hard for so minor a difference between buyer and seller. "They're bound to be. All prices are arbitrary that are not ruled by a market. That's sense. You don't sell pictures by the square foot. If you

'did you'd be entitled to ask the market quotation at the moment. But with your work who's to say? There are probably a dozen people showing on the walls at this moment whose work isn't as good as yours, who are no better known than you, and who are asking twice as much as you. But there are other people—I don't say who are doing as good work, I'm no judge in the pure art sense—who are asking *less*."

"But I don't think I want to take less, Mr. Box-rider. I think I will decide to leave the picture in the hope——"

"Well, look here," with an air of a great concession, "as I've come so far—I didn't mean to spring anything more—but as I *am* here I'll do this: I'll go to sixty if you'll meet me—split the difference."

He could see her hesitate. He did not doubt that she was pleased she had got an extra ten pounds out of him. Possibly she was. Possibly she was extraordinarily excited by the thought of the relief that money promised. Many things were possible; for instance this, that that crazy impulse to force him to dramatize his instinctive commercialism was still alive in her.

"I might take sixty-five."

"No; sixty is my figure. You can leave it, Miss Senior, if you must. But it's a fair offer."

He saw now, and she owned with a little spasm of half resentment, that she'd let him see that she meant to surrender. It would not be defeat, of course; it would be divided honour. Only she was

still enjoying this development of the real man and she didn't want it to stop. A memory of what that money signified to her had returned now, and she framed the sentence of acceptance. But he was still speaking.

"Sixty is a fair price, a very fair price. If I hadn't seen that it would fit the idea exactly I'd not have offered anything. As it *does* fit the idea—"

"But what is the idea?" She was curious, but certainly not excited.

He was much too certain of himself to hesitate.

"The idea? Kingford's cocoa. That's the idea."

"But whatever do you mean—you—you *don't* mean—"

"What do I mean? Why, that I'm going to use your 'Waiting' to advertise Kingfords. That girl is going to be the 'Kingford girl'—the girl who drinks nothing else; she's waiting for Kingford's. She'll be all over London in three months; she'll be as popular as Sunny Jim used to be, only she's not to be laughed at but loved." He boggled over the word—a funny word to be on his lips, he reflected. "And there'll be another commission for you, you can bet your life on that, Miss Senior. When we've taught the public to know the Kingford girl we'll let them have her doing other things with the stuff—according to the season—or time o' day. Playing golf, swimming, having Kingford's for breakfast, buying it in a shop and refusing substitutes, going—"

"But"—she could not stop him until now, strain-

ing though she'd been to get in her word—"but I really couldn't think of it. If I'd known what you wanted my picture for, I'd have refused from the beginning."

"You'd what?" He was quite obviously astonished; almost breathless with astonishment. "You couldn't think of it? But I'm buying your picture; I'm paying you your price."

"Oh, no, you're not!" The pale chin became very firm. "You're *not now*, Mr. Boxrider. I didn't close with your offer. And even if I had done I should feel myself perfectly free to withdraw my agreement."

"But what on earth do you mean?" There was a gleam in his eye, a sudden angry flush in his cheek. And to *his* anger *hers* responded.

"I mean what I say. I should think it would be perfectly clear. I don't like advertisements—of any kind. I think they are coarse and vulgar and meretricious. They appeal to the stupid and gullible; and I object most strongly to them."

"But I'm not asking you to advertise a quack medicine. This is a perfectly genuine article. It's the best cocoa on the market—honestly it is."

"It may be. I don't know anything about it."

"You don't mean to say that when an honest article is offered to the public and you're offered a fair price to allow your picture to be used to help the sale of that honest article, you're going to refuse? I say it's the best cocoa there is."

"But," with an answer that only her sex could

have provided her with, "but then I don't like cocoa."

He looked at her for a minute almost dazed, a little confused by what seemed to him the flagitious irrelevancy of that answer. But his pause was only momentary.

"You really mean you won't sell?"

"Not to have my work vulgarized."

He made a sound of despair.

"Vulgarized? How is it vulgarized? Is the art you see in the National Gallery vulgarized because it's seen by every class in the country? And how is your picture vulgarized because it's seen by millions of men, women and children—millions more than ever saw a Gainsborough or a Van Dyck. I've got in my mind all kinds of stands. One by the National Gallery itself. There's a big hoarding there. I want to put 'Waiting' right across that board, and I'll undertake that for every man who turns into the National Gallery to see the 'Turners,' a thousand will stop for a minute and study the 'Senior.' "

"You can't change my mind for me, Mr. Box-rider."

She had risen, and, awkward and angry, he rose too. His ideas had poured forth like a torrent in spate; he had had no pauses; whether he had caught a glimpse of what was the fact (and a fact she only discovered herself later—discovered to her fury), the fact that as his voice had gained speed it had gained authority, so that for the moment his mood

conquered hers and she listened—whether he'd seen that is quite doubtful. "You can't change my mind for me, Mr. Boxrider," was not a calm withholding on her part; it was a shrill, declaratory thing. But he was angry still—too angry to see.

"I think your decision's absurd! It's difficult to be patient with you. Did you never hear of Millais' 'Bubbles'?" (Whistler's portrait of his mother had not at this time been used as a poster.) "Aren't there R.A.'s whose pictures are used? Don't the best black-and-white men fight for this work?"

"Go to them, then. Ask them."

"Well, I might do. But I'm not going to. That picture of yours is exactly what I want. It fits into a scheme. And—" (he came an inch closer), the thing that he said now may have been melodrama; but she remembered it—"and I'm going to get it."

"Of course you are not. You forget I haven't sold it."

"You're merely being obstinate and prejudiced. And I won't take 'no' for an answer. In your own interest I won't. I'll come back in a week."

He walked to the door; there were no compliments by way of farewell. He let himself out. She was alone again in a flash.

And only then did it occur to her that when he had threatened to come back she had not forbidden him, told him that she would be out.

She took a step towards the door.

But he, standing on the street side of it for a pause quite long enough for any purpose in her

mind, went down into the street at last, and turned away still unrecalled.

Boxrider would have denied savagely that he was a dreamer; that he had ever dreamed a dream in his life. But Beech found him pleasantly silent for the rest of the day. And when he had got home and had had his supper those two parents of his, with their divine secret of possessing the most astonishing son in the entire length of London, watched him with unsparing surveillance, and when he had gone up exchanged glances.

“Got something on ‘is mind, mother.”

Mother did not nod, did not speak: merely looked into the fire (there was always a rag of fire in that kitchen grate, summer as well as winter), and she looked into that little flame now, seeing afar off, as it is given to mothers to do, the first tiny shadow of a danger.

A good enough pair, these, to look at, though not a pair to leave any distinct impression even on an observing mind. The man with an odd air of being still somehow just a little astonished by Life, even as it was presented to one now in his late ‘fifties, he had always felt that his son knew more than he did, even while the boy had been at school. He sat there, with his long, pale face, pale eyes, shaven upper lip contrasting with the clipped beard, and went on reflecting without speaking. All his life he had been with the West Ham Corporation. A good job his: for years now he had had the collection of gas accounts, and he had done it with sufficient tact to be

popular and yet with enough success to be approved by his authority. He had learnt to "study folks," especially "folks in corners," who had to have a little time to pay. But he had never studied anyone like Richard. He found his son as difficult to read as he found "mother" easy. As for her, she talked little: a woman of pervasive calm. Nothing had ever ruffled her, brought a shadow across the blue of her eyes, taken a touch of colour from her round, smooth, glowing cheek. She sat there, a small, rotund figure, for the first time with a doubt in her mind.

Her son was upstairs, but presently she could hear him coming down. . . . It was now that suddenly she stood up as there came through the closed door the sound of someone slipping on the stairs, followed by a suppressed groan.

"It's Dick."

Father only got to his feet by the time she was in the doorway, but he was in time to catch Dick's explanation.

"Like a mug, I slipped. 'Fraid it's a sprain."

II

Apparently Boxrider *had* been dreaming.

How else did he, sure-footed as he was, trip on the stairs and be found a minute later sitting at the stairfoot with a sprained ankle? When, next day, a doctor was called in he said it would be a three weeks' job.

The thing disgusted Boxrider as nothing had ever done. He would have to leave Beech in charge, and just when he had begun to get a hold on things. Gladden, for instance, had asked him to call. But above everything there was Kingfords. Gladden could wait; Kingfords must not be allowed to. That picture must be bought at once; and since he could not go, and writing was useless, he would have to send Beech. It infuriated him to think of Beech going to that girl with his feeble gentlemanliness. . . . But she might sell to someone else, and if that happened. . . .

For three, four, five days he struggled against the conviction that he could not go himself. Then he yielded to circumstances. The week would be up. "I'll come back," he had said, "in a week." Beech must come out to Minton; so he wrote to his senior partner. And the next evening there was that partner coming delicately up the stairs and talking to Boxrider's parents—as their son told them afterwards—like some rotten squire among his villagers. The senior, with a look of distaste for the stuffy, crowded little room with its cheap lithographs (presented to collectors of coupons of "Bullpip,") set himself gingerly on the one bedroom chair, and the talk began. But suddenly Boxrider cleared his throat.

"Now, there's something else, Beech, and here you've got to go careful." (Boxrider's slovenly English always profoundly irritated his partner.)

"What is it?"

“It’s this. I didn’t tell you—knew you would not be interested. I’ve got a real cinch though. It’s for Kingfords.”

“Kingfords,” Beech frowned. “I thought Kingfords was in *my* hands.” He didn’t like this talk of Kingfords on Boxrider’s lips; still less did he like what the use of such talk seemed to suggest.

Boxrider shrugged shoulders, though with a quick smile and deprecatory wave of arm. “Oh, yes! I know all that, Beech. But I don’t agree that if one of us sees a good idea that would suit some client who’s being worked by the other, the chap with the idea isn’t to chip in. That would be fool’s policy. We either want business or we don’t. *I* say we do.”

“Certainly, certainly. But all the same there are —er—departments of —”

“Blow departments and don’t frown like that for any’s sake. You look like a sick governess and give me the pip. What I’m on to is going to put money —cash—bawbees into *your* pocket as well as mine. So let’s get on with it.”

“Well”—impatiently—“what is this precious scheme of yours?”

Boxrider leaned forward and spoke impressively. “What I want—what I’ve wanted for a long time—is to convince you that the advertisements Kingfords are putting out are a mere waste of money.”

“I suppose you realize that when you say that you are involving me?”

“Oh, yes, I realize that!” said Boxrider cheerfully. He was sorry, but Beech must be got to

understand that the copy he had turned out for Kingfords was hopelessly feeble, woolly. "But they're complaining themselves—you know they are. They're always grousing. We mustn't let them go on doing that. And what I'm out to do is to put them ahead right away. And I'm doing it. I've got the scheme in hand, and when you've done your bit—"

"My bit?" put in Beech, a little shrilly. "I think before I have any hand in this—"

"There you go with that sick-governess look again! *Your* bit, that would have been *my* bit if I hadn't got tied by the leg." The swift, energetic mind of this young man must, it will be seen, always be moving on, perhaps relentlessly. But it was not a studied relentlessness that was in action. "But you'll have to put your best manners forward, wear a clean collar, and pull yourself together if you're to deal with that girl."

Beech started. "Girl? What girl? What woman have you been involving in my—our affairs? Because—"

"Oh, you'll find a woman is pretty badly involved! You're in for it, Beech. I'd really like to see you up against her; I would indeed."

"You still don't condescend to make yourself—"

"Clear? I'll make myself clear, my dear old soul."

There was a kind of policy in his treatment of

Beech. It seemed to him that it was absolutely essential that this man with his curiously dilated consciousness, his slightly abnormal psychology, must be thrust into life. He ought not to be spared, or protected, or afforded special tendernesses; he must be pushed out into the world; must see his prejudices trampled on. He must, in the common phrase, be made a man of. Boxrider's character has been misread if it is denied the possession of generosity, tolerance, even mercy. But a young, swift mind which has won all its victories by frontal attack may, while yet in its hot youth, fail to realize the importance of movement upon a flank. He rather liked Beech as a matter of fact, and (as he often said to himself) when he'd shaken the old fellow up, made him see straight, he would do a good deal for him. In the meantime he was running on.

"Yes. I'll make myself clear. I've done so as a matter of fact, I think. I've told you your job, and if I wasn't tied up here I'd be after you—I swear I would, and watch you at it trying to persuade her when *I* couldn't."

"Oh, there was something *you* couldn't do, was there?"

"Oh, there's nothing," with that cheerfulness which Beech found hardest of all to bear in his partner, "there's nothing that I can't do eventually! I get what I want in the end. I told her as much. I told her I'd come back this week and make her sell."

“Sell? *Sell?* Sell what? And you haven’t troubled yet, by the way, to tell me what this she——”

“This she is an artist, *the* artist I ought to say. A Miss Lesley Senior. Painted a picture called ‘Waiting.’ Hung in the Academy. Picture seen by me. I, being pretty well entirely on the spot that day, saw in a flash that that picture was what Kingfords have been waiting for. So off goes I to the lady—there’s the address on that envelope—and offer her fifty. Her price was seventy pounds. We agree to split the diff., but no sooner is that settled than she gets at my object. And what d’yer think happens then? *She refuses.* Point blank. Says no. Like that.”

“She thought advertising vulgar?” It was curious—that note of rising, but suppressed, sympathy.

“Perhaps,” Beech was murmuring, “perhaps she was right.”

“Right? *You* to say that! Look here, I don’t know that I’ll give you the job.”

“Give me the job! I think I might remind you, Boxrider, that while no doubt I’m almost a cypher in what was once my business——”

“Oh, look here, Beech, do chuck that hopeless rot! Anyone would think sometimes that you were a child. I don’t care *that* for these points of etiquette—if it *is* etiquette. But you’ll have to pull yourself together all the same for this job, which I ought to have done but which I’m pushing on to you. And, for any sake, don’t try that bleat of sympathy. If

she'll sell the picture, we're made. It's exactly what we want. It's simple and it's beautiful, and yet it isn't sloppy, like those silly round-the-table pictures that make men, and often enough women, jeer or feel sick. It's the picture that was painted to put Kingfords ahead, and when she's given in, as she's going to do, as she's *got* to do, we'll put 'em ahead."

"But even now, you know, Boxrider, you haven't condescended to give me the facts."

"Facts? Those *are* the facts—except that there's this. I said I'd come round to-day to hear her surrender. She'll be expecting me. Well, obviously I can't go, and so you'll have to."

"But suppose I disagree with you—"

"Oh—do—cut—that—out! You don't disagree with me. You're not such a born mule. You want to live. You want business as much as *I* do. And—"

There was further argument, the one man keeping his temper, pressing smilingly and at last winning; the other flushing up, talking quickly and shrilly, and at last yielding.

III

The idea of setting out to interview a young woman—a young woman of any kind, subtly excited Beech. If he was angry in his hot, confused way—as he was at every task given him by Boxrider—he was extraordinarily conscious of a strange tart pleasure. He had not said to Boxrider, "What is she like?" He

had had it on his tongue to ask, and then his dislike of being helped by that man had silenced him.

A woman artist. He did not know. Blue-stocking probably. Probably wore pince-nez, was dressed in sloppy and spotted velveteen. He took considerable pains to lower what were undoubtedly expectations. He had never seen any of these women, but he had read about them. He ransacked all his lore, and indifferently well assembled lore it was!

But there can be little question that one thought which really did operate to attract him to this Fair (or Sallow) Unseen was that, clearly, she had defied Boxrider. His mind advanced to her therefore with a sympathy that slowly took on passion. She had his own point of view in these matters. She despised the advertiser; she would do nothing to aid the blatancies, the coarse appeals, the crude vulgarities of that trade; he remembered with a mental sneer that he had heard it called a “profession,”—*his* a profession! And he was supposed to be setting out to convince her of her errors, he was “instructed”—he took a malicious pleasure in thus contributing to his own self-despite—he was instructed to reprove her for holding precisely the views he held himself. And in this preposterous situation he had submitted to orders!

From thus presenting the case he passed to a sudden and inevitably confused and angry examination of his relation to his partner. How came it that he was on the errand at all? True, Boxrider was

held up by his accident. But how was it that he (Beech) had not so much as been asked if he would be willing to go? He had been told to go. Yes, cried this aroused protestant, *ordered*—like a clerk, like Bexley. No, if it had been Bexley, he argued with that mental shrillness to which his thoughts so quickly and easily rose, Boxrider would have said “please.” He was always sharply polite to the staff.

Suddenly Beech drew himself together in that curious half feminine way of his (and in important respects his psychology was distinctly feminine). He had not seen this woman yet; and when he did see her he would show his independence . . . a new sickly thought came. He would not tell Boxrider afterwards . . . not clearly . . . would not he though! argued the second voice. . . .

When he reached the address and had rung the bell, he found himself forgetting Boxrider, forgetting even his errand; and mastered by a sense of the adventure. He, the recluse, the ascetic, was submitting himself to a delicate, sweet, astonishing experience. He was going to sit very close to a woman, was going not merely to exchange that dissembling small talk which he had heard other men use to the opposite sex, but was to discuss with her a question of real importance to her—a question which would probably rouse in her the essential woman, whatever that might be, give him an insight into that—as it seemed to his unsophisticated fancy—miraculously disposed sex.

When the door opened he found himself confronted by a fair woman of full figure, extraordinarily fair, who regarded him mysteriously, if smilingly, from blue eyes. The small extremely white left hand with which she held the door carried a wedding-ring, so that even as he murmured, "Miss Lesley Senior?" he knew she would say, "No."

"No, I am Mrs. Graeme. Did you want to see Miss Senior?"

He felt uncertain about this Mrs. Graeme. She belonged to the type of woman who contrives an air of amused detachment. He felt curiously aware of the presence in her of experience. Married? Perhaps that was it. He felt *handled*, a child—though really he could not believe she was remotely interested in him. But he had a funny sense of relief that she was not Miss Senior. He told her that he did want to see Miss Senior—"Rather; it's business."

"Oh, yes, business!" She had nodded and had led him into the room where before his partner had gone. "You are Mr. Boxrider perhaps?"

"Oh, no! Certainly not!" he cried, with what he felt was an absurd and indecorous appearance of anxiety. "My name is Beech. Boxrider is my partner." He wanted to say my "junior partner." He felt her studying his face with the first show of curiosity which he had discovered in her since his arrival.

"Oh, then I expect you have come on the same business as brought him here last week!"

“No, certainly not—that is——” But by this he found himself in an open doorway facing a slender woman younger than Mrs. Graeme—an infinitely more disturbing and affecting vision; even then he seems to have conceived of her as of a vision; someone with mysterious attributes, who shone . . . (even then, too, he thought of her as “Lesley”).

His mind was involved in an immense confusion, yet in some experience intangibly delicious. He found himself affected as he had not supposed himself capable of being; and yet in one transient moment of detachment he discovered himself thrilled and delighted at his own capacity to be thus moved.

And in the meantime an introduction seemed to be proceeding. (Introduction? He did not seem to need an introduction. The mere idea seemed to some obscure fancy of his preposterous.)

Yet introduction there was.

“This is Mr. Beech. He is Mr. Boxrider’s partner.” Thus Netta, with a smile which had no interest for Beech now, his eyes being elsewhere—otherwise he might have wondered what, precisely, these little, tired, sleepy smiles of hers signified really.

“How do you do?” Lesley spoke coldly and guardedly. Perhaps she had caught a glimpse of Mrs. Graeme’s eyes. The gestures of that “stable companion” of hers would have meanings for her presumably by this: they had lived together for two years.

“Won’t you sit down, Mr. Beech?”

Beech, his mind already collapsing, lowered himself with intense self-consciousness until he came in grateful contact with the springs of the nearest chair.

“You wanted to see me? I suppose it’s about the picture.”

She was curious; she may have been angry; she was at least willing for Mrs. Graeme to withdraw and close the door. She could not really quite make out her visitor. He looked mature. What she would call middle-aged. . . . And this uncomfortable-ness. . . .

“Yes, about the picture,” he was murmuring. “My partner—well, he’s sprained his ankle. Can’t come—and he had an appointment with you, I understand.”

“Oh, no!” She was very cold and firm. “Perhaps you have not had the facts given to you. But he came here a week ago and asked me to sell one of my pictures to use as an advertisement. As I told him, I would not think of it. But apparently he refused to be content. He said,” she proclaimed with what was certainly intended to convey the idea of indignation, “that he wouldn’t take my answer, that he’d come back.”

“He would,” cried Beech with a sudden malicious outburst. He checked himself at once. “I mean,” trying to smile, “he’s always very keen.”

“Possibly,” answered this cold Miss Senior; “but I gave him his answer, and I can only repeat it to you.”

For the first time Beech dared to lift his eyes; he had been studying her fingers, observing their length and suppleness and delicate brownness, contrasting them with a thrill of delight and approval with the smaller, shorter, and infinitely whiter hand of Mrs. Graeme. But he met her eyes now suddenly as he put an eager question, "You don't believe in advertising?"

"I?" she said slowly, considering him again with astonishment. "I don't know that I have formed any views. I only know how I feel about my picture."

"Well, you think it's a degradation of your art?"

"If you choose to put it like that—yes."

"I wonder why you believe that—I mean that it is a degradation?"

She looked at him again, but this time with less energy, and he had a horrible and consuming suspicion that he was failing to impress her, that at any moment she might yawn.

"But," he cried eagerly, "I can guess your answer"—her attention must be kept—"and I expect you're feeling that, as you've already told my—my partner how you feel, you ought not to be called upon a second time." Oh! if only this intuition comprehension of her, as he tried fondly to think it, would find some echo in her, some show—if not of delight, at least of character. So far she was presenting herself as something quite impersonal and static. He had a blinding consciousness of futility. In a sense he did not know even now to what he

was opposed. "Called on a second time," he was continuing hurriedly, "to defend your position—which is—which I'm sure is a reasonable position."

"It is very good of you to say so," she observed with a half smile. Now what on earth had she meant by that? Was she really merciless enough for the thing to have the intention of irony?

"But I mean it. Look here, Miss Senior. I'd like you to know." He had the idea at this moment of capturing her—he who had never dared to capture a woman before—and yet, remember, he had seen her for ten minutes only! Well, but there was alive in him now some sense of the future, as if he recognized, in the Beech of the present, one who acted for some Beech of the future—the Beech who, in fact, would come into being so soon as he had had mental and spiritual leisure to consider the immense impress this girl had made on him.

He considered his words for a moment, and then went on. "I'd like you to know. I mean what I said. I think you're probably"—(the "probably" was the last concession to any stirring of loyalty to his partner)—"probably—no, *really*—right."

"You think"—she spoke quietly, and for the moment he had no notion of her intention—"you think your partner's wrong."

"Yes, I do."

"Did he send you to say that?"

"Send me!" His eyes had begun to burn, in his cheek there was suddenly a colour. "Send me! He doesn't *send* me. I'm—I'm the senior. I don't

mean"—he was trying to escape from a new trap—"I don't mean that I'm really so much older than he is, but I happen to be senior. I came because he couldn't." He stopped, feeling suddenly intolerably absurd.

"Still," she said coldly, "you have only now decided to disagree with him."

"No. It's a disagreement in fundamentals. It is, really." (Overboard with Boxrider—overboard with him!) "Only one doesn't often have the opportunity to talk to one who"—he became daring—"who sympathizes."

She was growing stiff, pushing her chair a little further away, as if contriving an attitude which should symbolize some obscure mental process by means of which she put herself further out of his reach, as an answer to his confidence!

"You must not include me, Mr. Beech. I—" she tried to smile—"I must not take sides. You want me to debate abstract questions. I only know that I can't agree to sell my picture, and"—rising—"I'm sure there's nothing more that can be said."

He got up uncomfortably. He had not done at all what he wanted to do.

"Except this," he hurried on to say, "only this. You don't understand my point of view, I'm afraid. But fundamentally it is yours. You'd be bored to know the details of how I ever drifted into my present occupation. But I did drift in. I assure you of that. You may be less bored"—he paused, perhaps himself obscurely conscious of being a passive

instrument in declaring the intentions of history,— “you may be less bored to know that I hope to make advertising a little less unworthy to associate with the arts.”

Grandiloquence? Perhaps. She made no comment, merely smiling wisely and leading him towards the door.

He was outside before he fully realized the utter futility, in the emotional sense, of the whole thing. They had not even had a fight.

CHAPTER VIII

I

LESLEY had no great pride in that last victory: that extraordinary twitching creature—what was his name?—Beech, with his funny little abrupt dignities: “He didn’t *send* me!” and with his easy surrender. She had a strange, hot feeling all the time he had been with her; she could feel his eye running over her, seeking her out. He had, she remembered, made her shake hands with him as he’d gone away. It was quite unnecessary. It wasn’t as if he was a man she knew, liked. The call had been strictly a business one. . . . That hot hand of his pressing hers. She could feel it still.

Then her mind turned to the circumstances of that call. This wretched man had come because the other man was sick. Oddly enough, she did not characterize him as the *other* “wretched” man.

Now, this woman was young, and this artist was still so little accustomed to a sense of achievement in her art that she could not forbear to go back sometimes to the place where that picture of hers hung.

You looked at your own picture, and then of course others—gay idlers—looked too, stood back as

you had done, there being something, presumably, to see. And of course there *was* something to see.

She entered Burlington House and went through the hall and up the staircase, past the sculpture in the front gallery, and so to Room XI, and there her "girl" stood bright and smiling in her vivid pigments. She still could feel the thrill of that first glimpse. A little throng moved to and fro, and she was about to take up her accustomed position when a voice spoke from behind her.

"Miss Senior, surely." She turned to meet the eye of Claude Coleton. Feeling suddenly involved in an excitement that her immediate consciousness assured her was inexplicable, she held out her hand, smiling the little conscious depreciation of a criticism aimed at the artist found visiting the work of her own hands! There really wasn't any use in a suggestion of mere accident. . . . Though what would be his thought? Would not a mind, shrinking with horror from vulgar ostentation, find here something odious—an artist in front of her own work?

"How do you do, Mr. Coleton? And am I to thank you for a compliment?"

"A compliment?"

"That I find you so close to my picture."

To her astonishment a little pucker appeared in the smooth forehead—something like a frown.

"Won't you let me take you to the tea-room where we could talk? You must be tired."

But she wanted him to speak of her picture.

"Tired? I've only just arrived, and surely you'll

let me look at my own picture. You know, don't you, that that *is* my picture?"

"Why, yes, I believe I *did* know that, Miss Senior."

She looked at him in mock pleading. "You haven't told me what you think of it."

"I?" he cried briskly. "I? My opinion of a picture is no opinion! It is, I am sure, a most charming expression of a most charming person."

She had leisure to admire his art of delivering a sentiment, deliberately unreal and intended to be recognized as such.

"But do come away," he went on, "and have tea."

Suddenly her eyes were lifted to his, studying him with a swift, strange surmise. For she had caught a hint of an explanation. (An explanation had seemed needed. And here it was suggested.) She had stupidly thought that for some reason he had not liked her picture, that its treatment or craftsmanship had offended some sense in him. It was not that. She had been ready to believe him a critic. He was not a critic. Perhaps he knew nothing about art. He was not interested in her picture. But he did not dislike it. He did not dislike this specific picture, that is. What he disliked was that there should be that picture, *any* picture by her. With that swift, almost startling intuition which is the birthright of all women, she had read him. He was interested in her. She knew that—she had known that, that night at the club. But, being interested

in her, he did not like her to be painting pictures. He hated achievement in the women in whom he was interested. He mistrusted that impulse to self-expression. A woman had no business to interpret herself in art: it was her business to interpret herself in terms of her relation to some man.

And that little unreal compliment, so intentionally unreal, was a form of reproof really. I give you this dummy, this unreality, and its want of value corresponds with my valuation of you—not as you are, but in the character of artist which you affect.

She looked at him quickly once; even though she found his egotism for a moment blinding. Egotism? But there was something else. An approach to herself—not to the artist, but to the woman. By consciousness of *that* she could be moved—what was the word?—thrilled.

His air of experience did not repel, as it might be expected to do, her young fresh mind. It drew her, it excited; and she was, of course—though she did not know it—extraordinarily flattered. Here was a man whom the world considered. Letting him lead her away to tea, she could tell from the way they were observed that people recognized Coleton. There were whispers, glances from interested eyes. “*The Coleton*” she heard one woman, with tongue less strictly controlled, declare to her neighbour. . . . And yet she had only awakened now to the fact that she had him at her side—this distinguished person. She had been thinking of the picture and other things—other people. She was seeing herself par-

ticularly involved in a preposterous argument with a young, gauche, assertive man. . . . Well, here was the proper antidote.

It seemed an extravagantly conceived coincidence all the same, that this man now giving her tea should speak as he presently did. Not that it was in its character of coincidence that Lesley saw this intervention of his.

“You have not sold the picture?” he murmured.

He had a way of murmuring like that. In his less compelled moments he always murmured.

“No, I have not sold it,” she observed frankly.

“I am glad to hear that. I mean,” he went on with a kind of tender approval, drawing a little nearer and beating gently downwards with a hand that seemed to portend secrecy, “I mean I am so glad you repelled . . . I met Netta—I should say Mrs. Graeme—and she told me of your refusal to listen to some dreadful person who wanted to buy it for—for advertising purposes.”

That was the thing he had said which had suddenly and so profoundly disturbed her. She did not want to discuss this matter with him. She was angry with Netta. What business was it of Netta’s? And then he went murmuring on.

“I was so glad you took that line. This advertising is so insidious; one is instinctively revolted. . . . Dreadful people! No gentleman would—” and so on. And it was all true. He was only expressing her own views.

“It is a debasement of art. It is dragging some-

thing fine in the public gutter. We who stand for art have something committed to our guardianship, and ill will be the day when we forget our trust. I rejoice, my dear Miss Lesley Senior, that you have not failed."

Once there came a funny little hovering suspicion . . . like a book—talking softly like a book. . . . When he might have talked like a man . . . and in any case she didn't want these praises.

Moreover, of course, even here there was some essential unreality. He did not like her to be an artist. Why go on then? And now another flash of illumination. How odd were these moments of intuition. But she looked at him again. . . . Did she interpret him aright? If she had sold the picture, would her crime have been so much that she had debased her art as that she had done something to establish her economic independence? A man—this man—did not like the women in whom he was interested to have that kind of economic independence.

But she must respond.

"Failed? No, I haven't failed. How could I? Did I not only the other night receive an admonition?"

She could feel rather than see the gathering again of some small disapproval. He did not like—What was it?—a note that he must have detected . . . facetiousness. And really she was astonished at herself—at that thing in her voice and mind and attitude. For she had not until now, in this sudden

meeting in the way, her mind with his, been at all conscious of any impulse to laugh.

She had only observed, reverenced, paid court to an ideal, and she could have been ready to asseverate her continuance in reverence. And now this laughter.

She was annoyed with herself, independently of her annoyance that she had brought that pucker back into his forehead. But even while she reproved herself there abode, lurking, that old hint, humour of —yes . . . softness: a softness that could not stand against laughter, the faintest laugh—the mere whisper of it. She brushed that thing aside as she had brushed it before. How unsteady her mind seemed to be! She would not listen, tolerate. Here was this man with his fine reticence, his shrinking from the noise and vulgarity of crowds. It was his fineness, his delicacy. . . . *She to laugh!* . . . She grew serious, though she would not put it to herself that she compelled herself to seriousness.

“You have set me right if ever I was in danger of yielding in that business,” she went on in an even voice.

He nodded, mollified if still uneasy, suspicious.

“Ah, one does one’s best! Some day it may not be necessary to take a strong line—to take *any* line. But let us talk of something more interesting than causes; let us talk of people. Tell me of yourself. No, I don’t mean about your work in this place. I want to realize you as an entity. And I find it so hard to realize the entity of a woman who will tell

me only of what she does for a living. Tell me how you pass your days, how you amuse yourself. Tell me—a woman can help me so much to understand her if she tells me her little delicate prejudices—her favourite colour, the poet she reads——”

She looked up, trying to preserve a precise static attitude—and failing.

“My colour . . . I think, is blue—ultramarines, purple. Perhaps you didn’t guess that from my picture. But it is my skies that I love to paint. . . .”

Again that little pucker.

“Ah! If for a moment, dear Miss Lesley Senior, you wouldn’t be so professional. Shop? Yes, I love shop—with a man. But a woman may make even talking shop seem a waste of time. Shop isn’t shopping. She could talk of things so much more interesting. Tell me what is your favourite flower.” As one might speak to a child!

His voice seemed to come up against her in long, soft waves . . . lapping waves. It seemed absurd that he should be asking her that, and she wanted to laugh . . . and really an anticlimax of some kind did seem to be involved.

“A favourite flower? Why really I don’t think I own such a thing.”

“But surely some flower enjoys the privilege of decorating your home.”

Decorating her home! “Oh, Netta likes yellow roses! She buys roses.”

“But what do *you* like?” he pressed gently. She could enjoy the pressure, the remote note of anxi-

ety: it was tributary to herself; but she could also find herself aware of some whisper of ironic comment, as if an intelligence outside her own observed and smiled and even hinted that that essential unreality in the atmosphere would presently be discoverd by herself. "You too may some day—smile."

She pushed the thing away; she was inclined to accept and enjoy what was being offered. Her eyes roamed the room and enjoyed the interest shown by the other tea-drinkers present in the person giving *her* tea—singling *her* out.

"What do *you* like?—it is one of one's ways of learning a woman's mind."

"But I love all flowers. All. Yes, all." She was sure she did. "Though I suppose I buy roses when I want to fill the flat with—with—when I want to please Netta, which I usually want to do."

"Netta—Mrs. Graeme—isn't always easy to please."

She looked up suddenly. Was it question or statement? She wondered what he intended—whether he intended anything. In any case, she could not see that it was his business.

"Netta is a very charming person to have as the sharer of one's flat. I always consider myself extraordinarily lucky that she came my way."

"How *did* she come your way?"

Again that slight pressure behind the voice, as if not mere idle curiosity worked to draw information.

"I met her at the club. I was living in rooms,

and I was tired of them. I found she was in the same condition. Then we planned this joint enterprise."

"And so you knew no more of her than that—she is a new friend really? You had, then, no friends in common?"

"None, except those we knew at the club."

"Ah, yes!"

He seemed to reflect for a moment, and she decided that she could make her move now. She must, she said, go.

"May not I also—"

But no, she had an engagement.

"A picture-dealer in Soho. I have to see him. He buys my pot boilers, you know."

He frowned as if to indicate that not merely did he not know, but that he did not wish to know.

"I hate—I suppose, my dear Miss Lesley Senior" (how he persisted in that elongated form of address!), "I've no right to say so—but I hate to think of your going into those places, chaffering with these wretches. It isn't what you ought to be doing. A girl like you should be sipping the sweets of life; living vividly a life of beauty and—and ease. It is almost intolerable to think of you having to submit to these tradesmen."

"All the same"—with a laugh—"all the same, Mr. Coleton, it's unavoidable, in view of the fact that nobody who has tried it has been able to live on air. I know I can't. So—" She stood up.

"Then let me come with you in case the man should be—"

“Rude? Oh, he’d never be that! He’d know too well what would happen. I’ve driven into him quite a wholesome fear of me and my tongue, I assure you.”

She could see the pucker deepening. How he hated every new hint of her independence—of her power to look after herself.

“Very well.” He sighed, ceremoniously moved her chair so that she could pass, and, still with ceremony, led her into Piccadilly.

“If our ways must part——”

She smiled, nodded with some slight emphasis, and ran across the street, just as a bus bore down. She could feel rather than see how the display of that coolness and ease in the midst of street dangers would newly lacerate his mind. Once in the midst of the traffic she turned to look back and smile. And the pucker could now be seen across the street.

The picture-dealer was haggling narrowly and stridently with a buyer when Lesley presently pierced the gloom of his shop; and sellers having to give way to buyers, she sank into a remote corner until the man was ready for her. She gave no attention to those voices coming to her out of the dimness—voices, it seemed, of paltry souls occupied with inconceivably mean ploys—until she remembered that presently she too——

There were moments when to be out of all this she would have surrendered. . . .

It was almost at once that she found herself beginning to react to the thought of that little talk with Claude Coleton. Of the fact of his interest

in her there could be no question. It occurred to her that the development of that interest must now rest with her. If she avoided him, withheld herself from him now . . . What was it that she wanted? She began to tell herself that she did not know what she wanted. But then, she inquired of herself, did he? What precisely was his intent? If the development of his interest rested with her, and she did her active part, to what would such development tend? For instance, supposing that she was not prepared to admit to herself that she wished to marry him, was it so sure that he wished to marry *her*? He enjoyed her society. He wanted to go on enjoying it. He would like to take her out, play with her hand, find her eyes looking up into his in absorbed admiration. . . . And then he would like to pass on. . . .

That was one diagnosis of the position. But she was less sure of that reading once she had made it. There had been moments when she had caught a flash of red flame in amongst the soft lights of those eyes of his. She could have what she wanted . . . have what she wanted.

Only. . . .

Her reflections were broken in upon by the dealer coming towards her, and her business took half an hour of absorbing effort. All the same, she was taking out her latchkey within two hours of her parting with Coleton (the shortness of the time has its interest). Entering the tiny white-and-gold hall she came suddenly upon Netta. Mrs. Graeme, whose

back had been turned, wheeled round, and Lesley saw that her eyes shone and that colour burned in her soft cheek.

“Look!” she cried. “Look! There was no name, but I have been able to guess who sent them to me,” and she held up a nosegay of yellow roses. “Only,” with a little joyous laugh, “I wonder however he guessed.”

“Why,” said Lesley, “because I told him. I saw him at the Academy, and I told him you bought yellow roses whenever you could.”

“You—you!” with a smile in which now there was nothing of that hovering malice. “You shouldn’t! But still as you did so, I’ll forgive you!”

“I had—I had tea with him.”

Mrs. Graeme looked up, smiling still. Lesley spoke with a certain sharpness—even of challenge. Apparently she wanted Netta to understand that she had been the object of a certain . . . interest? . . . perhaps . . . anyhow that she claimed for herself significance in his mind.

And Netta Graeme only smiled, come forward, and swiftly kissed her friend.

“I am so glad you had such a charming time, dear.”

Poor little Lesley! She needed sympathy with her pathetic little idea that that man was interested in *her*.

CHAPTER IX

I

BEECH did not visit Boxrider to report on his failure. Why should he? The senior partner to report to the junior! If Boxrider wished to hear further he could come to the office.

And that was precisely what Boxrider did. Three days later a cab pulled up in the entrance to Imperial Buildings, and Mr. Higgs, happening to discover the identity of the arrival, deserted his own lift in order to help the cripple to limp up the steps into D.

“What ‘ev you been doing of, sir?”

“Ankle,” said Boxrider briefly.

“It didn’t ought,” said Higgs.

“All the same,” remarked Boxrider, “it did. However——” and he allowed himself to be assisted across the marble hall. A moment later he was limping through the general office of Beech & Boxrider and filling the doorway of the private room. Beech sat there in his place, and looked up with that air of sharp displeasure with which always he witnessed his partner’s comings and goings. If he had a grievance because of Boxrider’s absence—an absence which had the effect of exposing himself

to the staff and particularly to James—he hated also to have his partner about him. He was always and extraordinarily aware of the pressure upon him of a dominant mind; the air seemed subtly charged with some quality of that young mastering associate of his. He felt himself breathing—Boxrider. He felt it now; he had felt it already. Boxrider, limping through the office, had created a hush there—and a moment before James had been whistling some slow measure of contempt! Oh, yes, the whistling had been aimed at him (Beech). He had perfectly understood.

But there was no whistling now. Only—that man, that man come there to triumph over him; to exhibit him to himself as weak, futile, incompetent.

“You’ve come back earlier than you expected,” he said thinly, looking down his nose.

“Yes, I’m here. You see, Beech, you did not write or send a message, or come round.”

“But you didn’t expect that, did you?” He tried to make it an amused protest, but the angry petulance broke out.

“No; to be frank, I *didn’t* expect you to, Beech. So I thought I’d better get down and see how things were going.”

“I, being merely senior partner, couldn’t be trusted, of course.”

“You talking through your silly old hat can’t be trusted. What on earth is the use of that absurd childish prattle?”

“Childish prattle, is it? Very well, Boxrider.

Childish prattle! I suppose silence is the only thing that befits me."

"Do—*do* try, man, not to be absurd. I wanted to get back to look after the work which is specially mine—will *that do?* And that brings me to my point—what about Miss Senior's picture?"

Beech's mouth twitched oddly as he tried to answer. But for a moment he quite obviously strove to project an air of indifference.

"Really, Boxrider, that picture! It seems to me, if you will allow me to say so, that you are behaving rather absurdly over that picture. The lady does not want to sell it, and I was extremely sorry that I had allowed myself to be used as a catspaw—yes, Boxrider, I maintain the use of that word. Your persecution of her——"

"Persecution! My dear Beech, one would really think you'd been eating something that had turned your vision of the world inside out. You're talking like an ass. Persecution!"

"Permit me to select my own words."

"By all means. Only don't talk so like a book or a silly ass, man."

"I suppose it is impossible for you, Boxrider, to refrain from being offensive——"

"Oh, you *are* a governess! I expect to see a ring on the middle finger of your right hand in a minute."

"A governess, am I? Well, I am, I hope, also a gentleman! I am at least sufficiently a gentleman to refrain from persecuting that girl."

“Persecuting! I believe you let her talk you round. I believe, indeed, that you didn’t want her to sell her picture, and I’m not at all sure that you didn’t take that line with her.”

“Well”—Beech’s voice rose into the high, thin note which always accompanied that character of speech which he was now using—“well, as a matter of fact, I *did* take that line. I am not ashamed to own that I did take that line.”

Boxrider leant back with a sigh.

“What a man! What an advertiser! What a business brain! Really, Beech, I don’t think I’ll ever be able to send you on an errand again!”

“Send me on an errand!” The voice had now reached a crescendo of indignation. (If he had known it, James, finding an excuse, had contrived to move across to a desk not ordinarily used which lay near the door into the private office.) “Send me on an errand! Confound you, Boxrider! Who do you suppose you are and I am? What do you imagine to be the relation between us? I tell you I will not have such talk! Send me on an errand!” He had begun to scream. “Send me! I will send *you*, Boxrider! I will send you! I have as much right—more right. It is *my* business——”

“So!” ejaculated Boxrider calmly. “And in the meantime you are advertising to the staff outside the fact that you don’t like your partner. Probably James is taking a shorthand note.”

“I don’t care! I don’t care!” All the same, the voice had sunk to a shrill whisper, like wind scream-

ing between boards, until it occurred to Beech that even in lowering his voice he did something in obedience to Boxrider. "I don't care!" he cried, raising his voice again. "Let them hear!" But even as before his voice fell to the shrill whisper. "You are becoming intolerable—utterly intolerable!"

"Look here," broke in Boxrider again smoothly. "Do try to see things as they are, my dear fellow. Nobody is being intolerable. I have no wish to be offensive in any way. I think you're a good fellow, Beech, only you can't expect me to agree with you every time. I'm sorry if I suggested I had the right to send you out. I acknowledge that and apologize. But do try to see things in proportion. You may be right and I wrong about Miss Senior, but you know that Kingfords *are* grousing that we have not given them the service which they've paid for. Well, I know—yes, Beech, I *know*—that that picture is what is wanted."

"I wonder if it is only the picture."

For the first time Boxrider's own voice rose. "What do you mean by that?"

We are perhaps never so ready to be indignant as when, in a charge levelled at us, we discover some remote particle of truth.

"What do I mean?" Beech attempted a strange, shrill chuckle. "What do I mean? Ah, I wonder what I do mean!" But he would not meet the hard, cold eye which, as he knew, his questioner had turned on him.

"Well, if you mean nothing, don't profess to mean something, Beech. . . . I say I want that picture and I'm going to get it."

"Get it? You mean to persecute that girl further?—after I have given her an honourable assurance that the matter is at an end?"

"Well, yes, I'm going on with it. And its useless for you to talk about persecution and honourable assurances. I'm going on because I've *got* to go on. We've got to keep the Kingford connexion. I'm not going to let you lose that, I assure you. And Kingfords want exactly what Miss Senior has to sell, and they're going to get it."

There came to the outer office a sudden sound of a chair pushed back; and a moment later Beech, flinging open the door, strode, pale, silent, and with head up, through the room and so to the door. A moment later that door had been banged behind him.

James, watching, winked at Bexley.

As for Boxrider, he could only shrug shoulders. He meant to persist. He had got to do that. If he did not, not only *their* business would suffer but Kingford's would.

But it was absurd that Beech was so unreasonable. Of course when they had got the picture, and it was on all the hoardings with a little "B. & B." in the corner, and congratulations and orders were coming in from Kingfords and other clients, and the income of that same B. & B. had increased handsomely—of course, then Beech would be the first to rejoice. He would then be capable even of deluding

himself, thought Boxrider, into the belief that the picture had always been a policy of his which had been advanced only over the dead body of his partner's criticism. So that there could be no other policy than the one of buying the picture. He was only thinking of the interests of the firm. . . . Well, perhaps not *only*. . . .

For that little challenge on the part of Beech still held its place in his mind . . . and he was not the man to refuse to meet a challenge. Very well then, he would own up. While he was quite sure that he was serving his own material interest and Beech's too, by pressing for that canvas, he was willing to admit strictly to himself that if the picture had been the work of another person than its actual painter he might have been more willing to yield to the fact of her reiterated refusal to sell. Well, he was not willing to yield now, and that thought set him to seize paper at once. He began to write a letter asking for an appointment. Then he tore it up and took down a telegraph form.

“Wish see you. Hope you will allow me call to-day four o'clock.—Boxrider.”

That would do. He rang the bell, and the office boy who had succeeded to the duties of the Jew came in and took away the message.

He had committed himself now. And it merely remained for him to follow up the message. Of course she could be out or refuse to see him. What was he to do then? But he had made it a rule never to envisage the possibility of an adverse circum-

stance; there was the policy of a philosophy in that rule too. She might be out if anyone else went to her. He resolved suddenly that she should not be out when *he* went.

II

She might, as a matter of fact, very easily have been out, and certainly her impulse was to find an errand. But then she remembered she had no need to find one. Her dealer had written that he could not sell the picture of "Flower Girls, Piccadilly Circus," at the price she had quoted.

"It is worth what you ask, and some day you'll get it. But you'll have to wait or sell cheap. If you get fifty you'll be lucky." (She was recalling those words of his uttered during her last visit.) Obviously he could not sell for more than fifty. And really it was all rather awkward, particularly just now. Bills; the rent of the flat. Netta had only a small fixed income and could not very well advance more than her half of the expenses. So that it seemed the "Flower Girls" would have to go at fifty. But from that thought she drew back in revolt. It was her best picture. If it had not occupied so much more space than "Waiting," the Academy would not have thrown it out. But their ultimate decisions were a matter of the foot rule, and so "Waiting" was taken and the "Flower Girls, Piccadilly Circus," was sent home.

Thus she had her errand. She could visit that wretched dealer . . . have it out with him, or go

round visiting other dealers. It was merely impertinent on the part of this advertising man to trouble her.

“Are you going to be in this afternoon, Netta?” she asked her friend suddenly at luncheon.

Netta looked up in slow curiosity.

“No, I don’t think I shall. I rather thought of doing Oxford Street and having tea at Hobson’s. Why?”

“Oh, nothing at all!” She told herself that if Netta had happened to be remaining at home she could have left a message with her. But she had a sudden curious doubt that even if Netta had been remaining she would have given her a message.

They could both be out. That was it. He would then hammer on the door unavailingly. That surely should convince him.

But, now argued she, he would then only come back, take her unawares, perhaps at some moment when his coming would be disturbing and unpleasant. Suppose, for instance, that Claude Coleton should happen to be dropping in to tea and that that dreadful young man should select the moment following Coleton’s arrival for his call. . . . No, she would have to remain, face him out, defeat him, finally convince him that she was an artist and not a tradesman, and that she could in no circumstances sell work if afterwards it might be put to vulgar ends.

Having decided to remain, she was immediately visited by doubts of another kind; but those doubts

were so obscure that she was hardly prepared to consider them tolerantly.

At three o'clock Netta yawned in her deep, softly cushioned chair, put down the book she affected to read, and turned an idle eye towards the window.

"Oh, my dear good Lesley, why are resolutions so much more easily carried out when one rises from a dining-room chair than from one like this? I never took myself for a philosopher before, but really I think I'll try to discover myself in that character."

"You don't mean"—Lesley wished and hoped that she displayed no remotest suggestion of interest or purpose—"you don't mean" (how slowly, idly the words were spun) "that you don't think of going out?"

"No, my dear. I do think of going—sometime. I am always going sometime. By the way, you look as if *you* ought to go out more. You are pale."

(Poor little Lesley!—thinking of that man who, if only he had had less absorbing interests, might have found a moment to look *her* way . . . and yet she, Netta Graeme, was not sure that even then. . . . He liked sophistication, experience. Poor little Lesley! But if these girls *would* delude themselves they must presently have some sort of awakening.)

"You are pale. You want fresh air," she was going on slowly. "I really think you should run round the park every morning."

"Battersea?" (Would Netta never get up and go?)

"Oh, I don't know! No, I think I meant Hyde.

Though, really, I fancy you best, I think, with your grey eyes, among the squirrels in Regent's Park. Yes, on the whole, I would send you there. Oh, dear, how the time goes! It's half-past three." (Would Netta never go?) "Or is it my watch that is wrong? The clock struck half-past ten minutes ago, I'm sure. . . ." (Would she *never* go?)

Slowly Netta stood up—at last. But she must dress now. She had left the room, and Lesley could hear her moving about in her bedroom opposite. (Would she never, never go?) Here she was now back holding out dainty shoes for her little fragile-looking feet. How did she contrive to make her feet look so fragile?

"What dear little feet you have, Netta—they look as if shoes, even those silly little delicatenesses, were all too harsh a binding." (Would Netta never go?)

Netta Graeme did not blush. But her eyes were suddenly bright. She could so easily summon a memory of other lips which delivered such words. . . . Poor little Lesley, envious, perhaps, even jealous. . . . Poor little Lesley, who really hadn't a bad ankle if she would not wear such "sensible" shoes.

"Yes, you're right, dear. I don't think the day is to be trusted. . . ." And if she must not—that woman—remove these aforesaid shoes and find others a degree less doll-like! (Would she never go?)

But Netta Graeme was shod at last and standing

up surveying herself in the mirror in the further corner of the room.

"I think I'll do now."

"Of course you'll do," cried Lesley eagerly. "You look perfect; even for you, you look perfect." (Go, woman, go! Go!)

"Yes, but I'm not quite sure about the cerise touch."

"You couldn't better it. If you take it away you'll spoil it all."

"I—wonder." But already Netta was moving towards the door. Somewhere from far away a clock was booming out four o'clock.

"And I was going without my list." She must come back to the desk and search. (Apparently she would never go.)

But now she was really, as she herself said, "for off."

"Good-bye."

She went out of the room into the hall. Lesley could hear her opening the front door. And then, click! She had gone. *She had gone.*

Lesley drew a queer, long breath. Then she found herself behaving absurdly. It *was* absurd. It really would have made not the slightest difference if Netta had remained. What difference could it have made? Indeed she would have had an ally.

Suddenly she stood up, bracing herself.

Somebody had knocked sharply upon the outside door.

III

She approached the door with a curious subconsciousness of fear, as if the physical action of turning that latch involved obscure spiritual consequences. She uttered a panic condemnation of herself for not running away to that dealer.

Opening the door she caught a glimpse of that hard, smiling face (she told herself that it was hard), and she began, coldly, to frame a greeting. Then she paused, discovering something.

“You seem to have hurt yourself since you were here last,” for her eye was on the two sticks. (Evidently, thought Boxrider, Beech hadn’t explained why I’d sent *him*.)

“Yes, I had a spill. Like a blind horse I put my foot in a hole.”

“A sprain?” Indifferently.

“Yes, a sprain. But a sprain doesn’t prevent a man from doing business, Miss Senior. And so, as you see—as I warned you I’d do—I came along.”

“You know, of course, what my answer will be.” She paused. “You had better come in though, since you can’t very well stand up like that for long.”

“Oh, yes, I can!” he answered cheerfully. “Not but what it *is* pleasanter to sit down.”

“This way,” she said, and he limpingly followed.

She put him into the chair which Netta had but just left; then, believing that she did it reluctantly, she gave him a stool for his foot; and then, sedately, she leant back and spoke.

“I thought as you said you were coming I had better see you. I wanted you to understand that when I gave you my decision I meant it. I would not like to see my work on the walls——”

“Then you put yourself above the greatest artists of these and other times?”

“No, I don’t. That is absurd. But great artists do not sell their work for purposes of that kind.”

“Don’t they? What about Millais? You put yourself above Millais. Don’t you remember ‘Bubbles’? And, look here, I’m not an artist, but I’ve picked up some ideas about art—and people. It’s pretty useful if you can pick up ideas about both. Then you can begin to realize that perhaps Millais did the biggest thing in his life by letting a painting of his go on to the walls—not of the Academy, where a few bored upper-middle-class women with no notion of any art, least of all of the art of life, would see it—but on the walls of London and Manchester streets. And Millais doesn’t stand alone. If you studied the hoardings in these streets, if you looked at the names in the corners of the advertisement pictures, you’d see names you knew, bigger names—if you’ll not misunderstand my putting it like this—bigger names than your own, people who are on the line at the Academy at this moment.”

“I—I don’t remember ever seeing any.”

That reply slipped from her before she realized its profound significance to the general situation in which those two sat involved. But almost at once

she knew—she recognized that in its form her answer was a temporizing. And with a curious little intaking of breath she knew that he had recognized it for just that.

“No. You don’t remember seeing any. But you will, I am sure, take my word for it for the moment. And yet——” suddenly that idea came to him: that idea to which he looked back afterwards as to an inspiration—“and yet, look here, Miss Senior, I don’t ask you to agree. I shall not consider that you are conceding anything. But will you come to no final decision until I have had an opportunity of proving to you that artists of what you’d call the most respectable achievement have used the walls—splashed the colour about to help the sales of tea and cocoa and to bring new visitors to the seaside. Will you hold your decision till then?”

Now the obvious answer had been “My decision? I thought I’d given my decision.” That was indeed the answer forming, as it were, in the foreground of her mind. Her sense of the infinite mystery of the human ego—her *own* ego—became from this moment acute. Two distinct impulses seemed to move her, and that obvious answer did not pass her lips.

“If I agree to hold my decision, as you call it, is it understood that when I *do* deliver my decision it is accepted without further—further——”

“Argument? Yes, I agree.” He did not exhibit his triumph; he had been too long at the game, as he would have said. His attitude was submissive; he preserved an air rather of consciousness of hav-

ing yielded far more than he had originally proposed to do. But actually each was perfectly aware not only that a concession had been made, but that in the other a recognition existed that a concession had been made. "I know—and *I* know that *you* know."

Her intelligence was doubtless at the moment actively engaged in trying to discover how she had come to deliver an answer so different from the one she had framed ready to be given out. But his was active with something else: his was a highly originating mind at all times, I suppose!

Well, he made his further proposal.

"Look here. If you're to see those pictures—begin to get a conviction—you can't begin too soon, can you?"

"What do you want me to do? Get a list from you showing where to find these wonderful exhibits, and then go round laboriously viewing them?"

"Yes and no. There's my taxi outside. It's there at this minute—or it should be. I told the chap to wait. Well, come with me now, and I'll show you. We can drive round right away."

"But—but—" she was beginning. She plunged wildly. "Your foot. You oughtn't—" (Why didn't she decline a proposal as preposterous as it was insidious? But she gave up trying to understand herself to-day.)

"My foot? I'm not going to walk. I'm going to ride, as the Americans would say. And when I get to the place where the picture is I'm going to use my

eyes—not my toe, even if there are pictures I'd like to put my foot through!"

"I don't know whether——"

"Oh, come along!" He stood up, speaking at the same time with a certain swift authority that had won him victories before.

For a moment she hesitated. Then, "Well, since I've promised to see these wonderful wall-displays, I may as well get it over, I dare say."

"Yes"—he butted up his head—"yes, I think so."

In her room, putting on her hat, she had a moment of leisure to marvel and—repent. But she continued to put on her hat. Every moment of that brief pause had afterwards for her some character of the astonishing. For every moment was surely implicit with possibilities of withdrawal, and still she went on with that business of affixing pins, sliding into a coat, putting on shoes . . . and, well, there was a pause now while she considered herself with a care that she recognized as singular in the mirror. . . . She looked down at her feet remembering Netta's . . . yes, she was curious and anxious . . . and really, if the truth be confessed, ready to make an impression.

And at last she went to join him again. He had got up, she found, and conveyed himself almost to the door (conceivably thinking she might change her mind if she had time to sit down again and further argue). She was in upon him—almost in his arms—ere she discovered where he stood.

She shot back. "I thought you were over on that chair." This, breathless.

"No, I was ready, you see—ready for you."

She looked at him curiously, critically; for the first time perhaps with that precision. "I should think you'd always be ready for people." That, surely, was a looking into something personal in him, an unnecessary and therefore—if he wanted it—a to-be-welcomed curiosity. He felt himself subtly individualized. Perhaps she realized suddenly that it was in such terms that he might see the attention she had paid him. She hurried back into the impersonal before he could answer.

"I suppose being ready is part of the attention we have learnt to look for in men. We've been spoilt." ("Being ready," as if she had meant the thing in that sense when first she had spoken of it.) He merely smiled and nodded, keeping perhaps some part of a secret—the secret of how he had interpreted the more vivid and spontaneous of her words.

"And now we're off, I suppose," he said. He made a step towards the door to hold it for her and she saw him wince.

"You must go first, please."

"*I'm* all right."

"Please. Your foot." He supposed every woman could sentimentalize over matters of that kind. He was, vaguely, annoyed. That over-robust intelligence of his demanded, he imagined, even in his relations with a woman, something with a quality of

hardness. For what could be called the minor tendernesses there did not seem to be any very obvious place. Sympathy was good, tenderness, yes; but not sympathy for a mere passing and trivial affliction. There was nothing heroic in a sprained ankle—nothing heroic even in the endurance of it. . . . But it was not the essential triviality of the affliction which made him brush aside her sympathy; he was acute enough to envisage a future in which her prejudices underwent some process of correction—the correction of these earlier thoughts, that tranquillity in which emotion was to be recollected; well, when that time *did* come she would find herself remembering tenderness to him for a lameness which in the meantime had passed. . . . She would feel herself a little—what was it?—foolish, as one does feel oneself when stricken with a sense of over-emphasis.

Half-comprehending his attitude, she yielded, and for the rest of the afternoon she agreed to ignore his foot. She let him struggle down the steps and enter the cab unhelped after he had assisted her within. Then, giving an address to the driver, he came in and sank into the place at her side.

For a young man there is of course mysterious and overwhelming sense of intimacy to be got from sitting beside a woman in the padded softness of a closed vehicle. The fact of sex becomes vivid, all-dominant. Rhythm—vibration—attraction, what is the secret that links them? For Boxrider the experience was so new that it broke upon him suddenly now in a swift wave of experience. He felt

extraordinarily and specially aware of her now, though he had expected something. All his ideas, however, had been empirical: a woman—for that matter, *this* woman—when you got her close must present you with some kind of experience, specialized, poignant, even what was called thrilling.

Each was profoundly stirred by that contact. The sharpness of those first exchanges gave a curious and rather fearful impression of reaction to some prodigious expenditure of spiritual energy. There they sat, each drawing a breath, waiting—waiting for some enlightenment as to the proper dealing with a situation of extraordinary novelty and consequence. He wanted in speaking to strike a note; she was half-conscious of some impulse to deflect what she dimly conceived his intention. She told herself that she did not like this man, but that she liked adventure; and, liking adventure, she had let herself be involved so far, and that now she would have to be careful. As for the man himself—when he spoke he knew not if he said the thing he intended.

“What a good thing it is that you’re a business woman.”

“Business?” She could remember, oddly enough, at that moment another man who would not have praised her for that grace. “Business? Oh, yes, I’m a business woman! I have to be. I have to sell my work.”

He laughed. “I’d like to sell it for you.”

“Oh, I can do quite well in my own small way,

Mr. Boxrider! At least——” She paused, remembering the “Flower Girls, Piccadilly Circus”; she had not sold *that*, and she would have to do something soon. *Have to*—— (Netta had asked her something only that morning: “What about the rates? I’ve just found we haven’t paid them.”) “At least,” she was going on with a tiny flush, “I generally do pretty well. Sometimes the buying people are a bit——”

“Market a bit sticky,” he suggested. “Yes, markets are. And, as a matter of mere common sense, when the market *is* sticky, sellers don’t—don’t——” He broke off now. She looked at him.

“Yes?”

“Oh, nothing!”

“You mean—I think you mean——”

“Well, yes, I did mean that. Sellers don’t refuse good offers when they *do* get them.”

“Why didn’t you say it at once?”

“Oh, well, for once I suppose I had an impulse—to, well, not to press——”

“I shall really begin now to think of you as less strictly a business man, Mr. Boxrider, than I originally imagined!”

He considered. He was not sure that he wanted to be denied the acknowledgment of his own emphasis. He wanted her to think of him, she *should* think of him, in that way.

“I hope I am always a business man,” he said. “It’s a man’s job to be always—whatever he is!”

She looked at him, amused at the egotism. It was

the only kind of egotism she could permit in him without injury to a certain conception.

But presently he had his head out of the window and was calling to the driver to stop. They were afloat beside that immense island wilderness, and there, before them, rose that same giant hoarding lifting its head towards the heavens. And upon its vast face sprawled great splashes of colour, enormous legends, tales in line, history in wash, and truths (or half truths) in rotundities of phrase and picture.

“If you see it in ‘*Tosh*—it is so.’ ”

“‘Tranquillity’ underwear puts a real sheep on your back,” and so on.

“Do you see?” he said. “Look at that sheep! You’d say it’s only an advertisement sheep. Whose name is on it though? Where else will you see that man’s work? Whose name? Isn’t it Rivers? Claude Rivers, A.R.A.”

He quoted the honorific letters with the unction that men who have not been at a university quote the degrees of their friends. “And do you see that picture up there of the ‘Court Fountain Pen?’ That fountain playing in the courtyard now? It’s good work, isn’t it?”

“Y—yes.”

“All the same, I wonder if you recognize the man’s manner.”

“Vaguely,” she began to admit.

“Oh, well then presently you’ll know it for work from the same hand as painted the picture alongside

your 'Waiting' in Burlington House! And finally, look at the big picture of that woman with 'Rose's Soap.' That woman is a portrait. By whom? Not by one of your chocolate box folk, who *do* get into the Academy when all's said and done. It's—it's by Granton—*the* Granton—the man you'd acknowledge to stand at the tip-top, wouldn't you?" He made no pretence to use the argot of the art world.

"Well, I don't profess to uphold his methods—all of them."

"Hedging, Miss Senior. Hedging."

She laughed.

"Perhaps. Yes, I'll admit that Mr. Granton *does* mean something to me—as to others of my generation. Whether he will mean as much to the next—"

"Oh, bother the next generation! He's ready to advertise soap to this generation; and if he will advertise soap, why on earth shouldn't you advertise cocoa?"

"Because—why, because—" But now she found herself hesitating. The answer had seemed so simple. But somehow when she wanted words they would not come. She was even aware of a strange emotion of panic and of that accompanying emotion—fear of the emotion of panic and of its possible effects.

He presently saw that he had gained some small ground, for he went on, "No, Miss Senior, you can think of no reason why, if Granton is for soap, you

shouldn't be for cocoa! No reason, except this utterly weak and trivial reason that Granton breaks with some tradition of the Past and that you are being asked to do the same. What is the use of the Past? It's dead, and what's the good of dead things? You don't stick to the stage-coach."

"All the same the coach may be a more dignified means of progression."

"No, I deny that. But"—he had put his head out and told the driver to move on a few yards so that a further span of the hoarding should come before her eyes—"there are some other things I want you to see," he explained. She looked at him with a sudden suspicion. Was it possible that this visit was being prolonged by his design? She pushed the idea aside. But in doing so she discovered in herself the dark suggestion that it was not merely the truth she coveted but the action which presumably would be necessary—she taking the line she did—following on the establishment and acknowledgment of the truth.

"Aren't we taking a long time?" she began feebly.

"There are these other pictures I want you to see," he persisted. She tried to look out, for the cab had stopped, but he leant forward as if she should look only when he chose, and as if, in the meantime, she should listen.

"Look here," he said. "I want to say this. Do judge a matter on its merits, Miss Senior. My proposition has its merits. And not only financial ones—though there are those. I'll pay you down on

behalf of Kingfords—we said sixty. But I'll pay you down—I'm justified in doing it and I *will*—a hundred!"

She felt a new excitement, and a new weakening. For she was now being offered a means of saving her "Flower Girls, Piccadilly Circus," and holding it for the future.

But an odd impulse made her speak, protest.

"No, we said sixty. That was agreed. *If* I sold, I'd sell—" But looking at him she couldn't discover that there *was* in his mind what she had feared. If he *was* strictly, in relation to her, a business man—

"Look here, Miss Senior, let me go on. Another merit is this. You are really *enriching* the minds of the people about you if you give them art to look at—Truth, Beauty—instead of vulgarly conceived, inartistic and stupid daubs. Is that nothing? Does your art so much belong to yourself? And by means of this art which you lend, if you like to put it so, to Commerce, you increase the trade of the world, you bring nations nearer and—you respond to the sense of the times in which you live. See?"

Suddenly he leant back so that she could get a clear view of this new aspect of the hoarding. Looking up she saw a fine, swiftly impressionistic painting of a dark Scottish valley. High around were packed the black hills, upon the face of which, in one corner, ran swiftly the narrow single silver of a stream. The observer was caught by this vision amidst the rather squalid bustle, the little, hurried

endeavours of these crowds going by ; looking up, ere he read the brief legend, he might feel himself removed to some atmosphere of splendour and loneliness—perhaps to a place dark with more than rumours of physical things, so that there came to him with a thrill the word when now he read it—“Glen-coe.”

The artist. Yes, that was the artist ; and below—“Via G.N.R.”—the tradesman. That would be her thought, he supposed. But he waited in silence. He saw that she drew a long breath.

“Don’t you see,” he began at last to speak in a low murmur, “that that picture is bringing into the lives of the people some of the colour and wonder and mystery of those places too far for them to visit ? Doesn’t it help *you*? ”

“Yes, I suppose—I think—it does. But my picture isn’t—”

“No, perhaps it doesn’t perform precisely the same service, but it is going to help.”

“Perhaps—perhaps you are right.”

“Then”—he did not press—“you’ll let us have this one picture ? I agree that you are not creating a precedent or that we are to expect you necessarily to go in for work of this kind as a general policy.” That was a sufficiently cunning touch. It did not assume her general surrender ; it merely ascribed to her an experimental concession. It allowed her to remain conscious of her own immense strength of purpose. (“I’m so sure of myself that I don’t at all mind letting you use *one* of my pictures.

By that means I shall prove to you and to myself that my work, when it appears on the hoardings of the country, is merely something commercial, or primarily commercial, and that it has no intellectual or spiritual influence whatever.” How that was to be proved did not appear.)

She was sufficiently under the domination of that idea of his now to allow herself to act in the rather absurd situation which he had created.

“Perhaps on those terms, and with that understanding, I will agree to let you have the picture. But strictly on the understanding that I haven’t made a precedent.”

“Thank you. I’m very glad. And I agree.” He held out his hand, waiting. He had half to turn to get his hand out, and now he could command a view of her excited face. His hand still waited. “Usual way,” he said shortly. “Closing a deal.” Her long, lean fingers met his. A moment later she wondered if men, in giving their hand to a bargain, did so with such slow emphasis. What a cool, hard hand—so different from the soft flesh of the polished Coleton, or—yes!—from the twitchy hot hand of that man Beech—that partner of this young man sitting beside her. . . .

She wondered. If she had a suspicion she was not in the mood to examine suspicions. She was excited; she had a curious sense of being involved in much more than in this odd contract to sell a picture; she had a profound impression of some reality in her life which had not been present until now—as if this

crudely expressed fact was something immensely relevant to the entire future.

She drew away her hand swiftly with a little flush. That man . . . he *was* a man. He had not held her hand as a man held the hand of the man with whom he had struck a bargain. Yet she could discover nothing in his eyes, when she tried to look at him, to encourage that idea. . . . Oh, bother these ideas, suspicions! . . . And there was something she must say:

“The price is sixty.”

“I offered a hundred. I’ll pay that.”

“No,” she was beginning when she found herself involved in a new dilemma. If she refused his higher offer—sprung, as such offers should be sprung, in the moment of pause in which a market was being prepared, in the hesitation which preceded the closing with an offer, in the second in which is born the “ready seller”—if she refused, she more or less acknowledged an extra-business element in their relationship. If she accepted, on the other hand, she would still not merely not escape consciousness that there was, in fact, such an extra-business element: she would emphasize the consciousness of it in her own mind! Feminine like, she decided on evasion.

“Isn’t that the Strand Underground opposite? Then, having done our business, I’ll take the train back. Yes. *Please*. You can use your cab to go home.”

She insisted, and had the really pleasurable sensation of conquering—if only in some narrower corner

of the field. Before he could say a further word she was in the street looking back in upon him. Really she had done that adroitly.

“I’ll forward your cheque to-night,” he said. (He was fighting hard for some further room in which to manœuvre.) “Will you instruct the Academy to deliver when the Show ends? And then there will be the pulls of the prints for you to see. I’ll bring them along or arrange for you to see them.”

She found that when he was actually speaking she could make very little protest. She realized, if imperfectly, that he was announcing his intention to close with her at once to prevent a change of mind (although ultimately he would certainly remind her that he had had her hand on the bargain, and that therefore there could be no honourable retreat). But he was telling her also that there would be further meetings. Well, if further meetings should be the outcome of business . . . she suddenly refused to consider her feelings in this matter.

Her mind had reached this point of refusal from that further point at which it had stood when he began to speak, in a flash rather than by a progression of ideas, so that all her thoughts were fused. Some part of her—her tongue probably—was calling “Good-bye”; another part of her—her legs conceivably—was hurrying her physical entity towards the depths of subterranean London. But certainly another part of her still hovered between his unstarted cab and that wall where a remote Scottish glen,

troubled only with its past, looked into the face of a London troubled with a very present.

She still thought, with a fearful and absorbing excitement, of this climax. She was, indeed, so immensely impressed by the character of the encounter with this man, so vividly conscious of some potential thing hidden in the affair, that she was almost incapable of these necessary commonplaces of speech by which alone she could get for herself a right to plunge below and find her train. She discovered herself staring into the pigeon-hole of the booking-office as if the booking-clerk had just called her by name from a deep sleep.

“He thinks I take drugs,” was the first idea that now came to her, as her eye met that of the mild young man pushing out her ticket; but with her mind forced down to this level it seemed willing to perform its ordinary service. She got into her train. But almost at once in that strange, exiguous, tubulared universe in which the passage north from the Strand is involved, that area of alternating darkneses and false dawns, in which low white walls are seen splashed by advertisements, she became conscious again only of the one thing those advertisements suggested. Or rather of the one personality. For she could still feel the impress of that man—feel it without being conscious of the character of the feeling—whether it was a grateful feeling or something much else. In a sense, so great had been the impact of his character and idea upon her that

she was stunned; she groped, she found herself occupied with a sort of impersonal conception of him as of a force signifying that thing for which he stood.

But surveying, with her mind thus dominated by his idea, those fleeting appeals in colour to the public passing here below, she was made aware again of his apologia. . . . These advertisements . . . the people's gallery . . . the great modern weapon of a world commerce—a world commerce that drew the people. She sat there while the train rolled on through its narrow burrow, and only with a start did she presently discover that she had reached her own station.

CHAPTER X

I

CLAUDE COLETON leant back in the deep chair in that corner of the library at the Grecian Club in St. James's Street which had come to be recognized as his. Coleton, said a carefully fostered tradition, must have privacy from the oppressions of Popularity; and in that corner he had sought it, found it, and, so far, kept it. Let him go on keeping it. So well understood was the tradition that you only advanced upon him if his eye seemed to give permission; otherwise you faded into the shadows in the doorway.

Two suppliants came, gazed, and being not encouraged to share a seat upon the throne, moved away, obeisance in their attitude. Presently a third figure, elongated, deferential, placed itself within the orbit of the eye of the personage (by some means Coleton had got himself elevated to that rank), and a moment later Coleton, recognizing that, this time, it was the secretary of the club who wanted him, nodded amiably.

“Good morning, Mr. Abercrombie.”

With eagerness and with some slight consciousness of the fact that he was a stipendiary, and therefore, in a sense, in the club's pay, and if in the club's

then more especially in that of this one of its more considerable members, Abercrombie advanced.

“Good morning, Mr. Coleton. Good morning. I really wanted to ask you”—(I believe in a recent novel of Coleton’s, Abercrombie, with his “I really wanted to ask you,” figures ludicrously. There can be no doubt that this nervous and slightly absurd individual lived in fear of a ‘distinction which had already been conferred upon a number of persons not associated with the club.)—“I really wanted to ask you whether you’d be willing to join the library committee. We feel that we should greatly value your advice and assistance. We’d like you to be chairman of the committee if you joined it.”

Coleton shook his head slowly and smilingly.

“No, no, Abercrombie. I make it a rule to decline all honours. *All*. You must not even nominate me. You must not really. I realize, of course, that it *is* an honour—a great honour. I think you told me once that Macaulay held the position when he was a member. I must decline, however, I really must. Though it is so good of you.”

“I am sorry to hear you say that, Mr. Coleton. We rather counted on winning your consent. Your place in the club is so important, if I may say it. Are you *sure* that you will not consent?”

“No, no, Abercrombie! You mustn’t exert that persuasive tongue of yours or you may merely unsettle me. I have long made it a rule to avoid even the smallest kind of publicity. Yes, that’s final. Why not ask Mr. Lampson? He’d do it admirably.”

And presently the secretary slid away. Later, in twittering accents, he was informing Lampson himself. (Yes, Sir Henry Lampson, Bart., now.) The Lampson newspapers are not unknown. A sort of touch with literature therefore; and therefore a kind of presumptive right to seats on library committees. At this time, however, speaking in terms of clubland, or in terms at least of such a quarter of clubland as was inhabited by members of the Grecian, Lampson had still his position to establish. He was not well recognized here; when still a candidate he had even had a fear as the time of election approached, of being pilled. Indeed, it was said that if a certain committee man had not had a toss in the hunting-field he *would* have been pilled. Well, if by reason of his association with letters, he could climb on to that library committee he would find himself in touch with people such as Gilbert Bostock and other men of *that* sort. The fact accounted, he supposed, for their acceptance of that man Coleton and for their elevation of the same person. Coleton's success in that quarter had puzzled Lampson. But Bostock and his friends were not merely eminent intellectually. They counted for much in the great world. You met them—everywhere. They could so shape things if they chose that *you*, too, could presently be met everywhere. They had helped some men—Coleton, for instance. A very useful club.

And as for Bostock and the others, he had now met them round a table frequently and with a kind of intimacy. So far so good. But while he had

never had a hope of such a thing till twittering Abercrombie had come to him with Coleton's hints, he soon discovered that his name had begun to be canvassed. And in a week he found himself definitely a candidate with Coleton as proposer; and a fortnight later, for the first time, he took his place on the committee, where to his further astonishment he found himself presently elected chairman.

Now, Lampson was not an ungrateful soul. He did not consult Coleton or give him a hint of his purpose; but certainly about this time Lampson's popular evening paper—the “Night Bird”—inserted a two-column review of the “Dream in the Desert,” which sent that somewhat exotic work through five new editions.

And the gratitude did not end with that particular expression of it. At this time the “Night Bird” was publishing that series of “characters” of the celebrated which later became notorious in book form as “Through Another Looking-glass.” In the “Night Bird” an article in the series was printed every Wednesday night. At the foot of the article appeared the name of the subject of the next. “Henry Kipple, the Bard of Empire,” you would read one week, and at the foot of the column rich promise of another revelation: “Next week Sebastian Grooge.”

Now the week in which Abercrombie had had a new name given to him for nomination for the library committee at the Grecian Club, the “Night

Bird" dealt with Granton, the artist: the great Granton. And the eager reader perusing the (more or less) authentic record of that distinguished colourist's life-story and presently reaching a conclusion, read, "Next week a character sketch, interview, and study will appear in this column on Mr. Claude Coleton."

But when the article did appear, the reader discovered it was no interview—whatever else it was. And he read this further note: "We regret to have failed in our endeavour to induce Mr. Coleton to submit to personal treatment. Mr. Coleton's dislike of being interviewed is well known, and he only consented to the appearance of this article at all on the strict condition that it related only to his work and to a study of his personality as revealed in and through that work."

Nothing in the whole series of sketches attracted such attention as the explanatory paragraph attached to this particular article. The "Morning" came out with a leaderette on the notable refusal of a popular writer to allow himself and his work to be vulgarized by means, etc. . . . A review devoted a special middle to the same theme; it was so charmed, indeed, by that hitherto unsuspected modesty that from that moment it dropped the slightly depreciatory attitude with which hitherto it had regarded the writer's work; while a popular literary weekly filled five columns on "Reticence and Literary Reputation," in which it not only exalted the ex-

ample of Coleton, but expressed the hope that his readers would see that his sales did not suffer too severely through his refusal to advertise himself.

And apparently his readers answered redoubtably, for I believe that his sales did *not* suffer.

II

I have merely traced one small modest action, one refusal to take an offered distinction, to its—shall we say?—undiscerned issue. It would really seem as if the unfortunate person who declines Publicity has it thrust upon him, as if to run from the world is but to follow a path into the arms of the world!

But to come back—there was Coleton sitting in his corner (“Coleton’s Corner” it was really becoming), having just spoken that refusal of honour. Abercrombie disposed of, he could have leisure for a little thought. There was really a good deal to think about. He was not, indeed, without a certain alarm respecting himself. He had always been able to hold himself in such perfect control. Women.

. . . Yes, he had known women. . . . It was even conceivably true that in his very callowest youth. . . . But not for years had there been that curious impatience within himself with the restraints he had sought to impose. Why, was he not merely stultifying himself in an important respect if he so lost control, if he allowed his attention to stray from the general to the particular? The general? His business was, yes, with the general. Did not all women

find him adorable? They gravitated to him; he was a secular priest of the closet: he heard confessions. Was not that the service he rendered to his generation? He warmed boudoirs with a delicate warmth of sensibility no less indubitably than an electric contrivance projects a merely physical heat. And he was—or he had hoped so—as perfectly under control as the radiator. He had allowed no woman to have cause for jealousy of these other women—or he flattered himself that he had not. Each was allowed to believe that she had a significance which he missed in the others. He had told each about the others with a careful and quiet detachment; he told every woman of all the others with that special, qualifying detachment; and he thus entirely discounted serious jealousy. The individual believed that he had been forced to know these other women in order to get variety in the feminine types of his novels—those feminine types on which he was understood to rest his claim upon the future.

By the exercise of this perfect detachment he had been able to serve the women of his time. He knew how his refusal of the more easily won popularities had aided his influence. They saw him as the preserver of an ideal in an age when idealisms were, as one frankly blatant contemporary had put it, “too expensive.” They believed that, in the phrase of the time, “he went everywhere.” They knew that his books were to be seen everywhere, that his newest book was the staple of talk in every drawing-room into which they ever entered. And, knowing these

things, for each of these women was there the superb compliment that this man among men, this Byronic figure without the coarser elements of its prototype, allowed himself to be known to, and of, themselves. He had laboured to preserve a real equipoise in his relations with them . . . and now?

Now he saw danger—danger to much that was important: perhaps to everything. Strive as he might, he could not always now maintain that complete, that admirable, that *necessary* detachment, that reserve on which his social success was built. That girl *would* invade!

She profoundly affected, and in one, not wholly obscure, sense irritated him. She seemed to set at defiance all his conceptions of the place and character of women either in relation to himself or to the world. They must need; they must depend. He was uncertain of her need; he was sure of her independence. But whatever she was or was not, her figure moved about in the foreground of his mind. He had been stirred by an impulse (that fact in itself was symptomatic—symptomatic of something dangerous).

He was stirred now by that same impulse—an impulse to find that girl, to ignore what would be called the possibilities; to care nothing for, even to defy, the possibilities—even to envisage them, to welcome them, to embrace them. For he had a curious conviction that yielding to that impulse would be the first step of a series; it would no longer be a detached action, as hitherto his encounters with

her had been—even his contrived encounters, if indeed he had ever allowed himself to contrive any (though now he came to think of them, to review them, they had been fortuitous merely—a meeting at the Women's Reform Club, a meeting at the 'Academy). But a meeting with her now would be something immensely significant; it might very well re-shape his life—even disturb the character of his psychology. He had a profound, grim sense as of one deliberately stepping Fatawards, involving himself in obscure consequences, ultimately perhaps splendid, but in the meantime indubitably serious. By going he dared a revolution in himself.

He began to be aware of a sense which earlier in life he had experienced—a sense of adventure. This was of all things the most to be dreaded by one desiring to preserve an equipoise. But the effort to impose restraints on his imagination only seemed to encourage those rebellious impulses.

He was in motion before he realized it, walking into the hall, and so to the street, with an abstraction which made him miss certain eyes bestowed on him. In Piccadilly he found a deep haze which made magic of the distance. Presently he paused at Dunch's, the booksellers, and went in; as he did so an assistant signalled to some remoter corner of the shop, and a florid little man in middle life, wearing a tail coat, and a grey silk tie pushed through a ring, came forward blandly.

“Good morning, Mr. Coleton. Good morning.” Coleton nodded amiably; he was definitely con-

scious of bestowing, of condescending. "Good morning. Anything new, Mr. Dunch?"

"Well, no. I gave a repeat though for your last only yesterday. Doing well; really well."

"Ah, yes! Good! It reminds me of that story told of Hazlitt." And he began to tell it.

"Lamb, Mr. Coleton, wasn't it?" suggested the bookseller. For a moment on Coleton's brow appeared that small pucker. He did not choose to be corrected by a mere tradesman. But then his brow cleared. The tradesman was a bookseller. He made it his business to know booksellers. He sought them out, conveyed to them a sense of his kinship with them. "We are the two ends of a great traffic—the traffic in ideas. Let us forget the middlemen—publishers, printers, advertisers, reviewers—let *us* join hands."

The way to get at a bookseller was, he found, or believed he had found, to have some ideas on a book not definitely in his own department, or in anecdotes of the past. With these he could begin exchanges. The idea that a bookseller was not necessarily his intellectual inferior, or that the man behind the counter could have as vivid a sense of the value not only of a book but of a personality, would have seemed to him something in the nature of an indecency.

Coleton moved on along Piccadilly eastward, through the summer haze. He had no expectation of seeing Lesley, but he had a whim to walk into Burlington House. He went up the wide staircase,

and reaching Room XI he sat down. The exercise involved in reaching this place had made him warm, but as a refuge from the August heat of the pavement the room had its value.

Settling himself, he gazed up at Lesley's canvas, "Waiting." He knew something of pictures, had dabbled indeed in art, and had even, as a younger man, written an imposingly informed monograph on the Umbrian School for a popular series. The technical skill of Lesley's work was not lost upon him; but certainly it gave him no pleasure to observe.

On the other hand, he had the pleasant reflection not only that she had refused to sell the picture for vulgar commercial purposes, but that she had refused, as he was easily able to convince himself, because of himself. He had by now reached a stage in the development of his "interest" in her (his own mental phrase) at which he allowed himself to separate her entirely from all other women, and in a sense to acknowledge that in thinking of her he did so as other men would do when in love with a woman. (He did not yet permit the idea that *he* was in love—such an admission would be *too* destructive of such elaborately constructed outworks.)

Sitting there observing the picture, and remembering that she had refused to sell, a new idea arose. It was excellent that she had not sold, since, by not selling, she stood in the way of her own economic independence. But if she had not sold she presumably would presently sell to a dealer. She had mentioned a dealer, evidently a Jew of a fellow. He

wished she had asked *him* to deal with the man. Because then she would not feel independent. The greater price which he would extort would be due to the projection of his forceful and masculine personality! “Of course, I can’t get prices like that. I owe everything to you.”

Doubtless she was a good deal disappointed that her picture had not been bought on its merits as a work of art by somebody who would buy it for his own walls. She had doubtless dreamed of that happening, perhaps thought of what she would do with the money, and so on. Now she would sell it cheap to the dealer. Well, he was not sure that his mind was exactly as it had been. The poorer the price the less assured would she be, the more ready to turn away from that sorriest of occupations for a woman, earning her own living.

But perhaps because that girl really was gaining ground in his mind, touching his imagination, a new idea came.

It came swiftly, with every element of surprise. And he really was astonished, in a sense, at his capacity for the idea. And yet he was extraordinarily delighted in some obscure way, as if he could not discover why he was so excited, but was charmed by the discovery in himself of a new capacity.

But coming now to that idea: she had not sold her picture—she would be reduced if she sold it to sell it cheap to a dealer. But suppose at this point an intervention came—suppose a buyer, a *willing* buyer, stepped forward. Happy circumstance for her, but

not for him. Yet, wait! Suppose the intervener should be himself. Suppose *he* bought her picture, gave her whatever was the price fixed by her when leaving the thing with the Academy. Would not her happiness have mingled with it a gratitude—yes, and a sense of dependence which would be entirely proper and pleasant?

The idea captivated him so that he got up at once and went round, highly conscious of himself in the character of distinguished patron, to the secretary's office.

“There is a picture—‘Waiting’—Number? It’s 591, and it’s in Room XI. I want to buy it.”

“Perhaps it’s sold, sir,” suggested the young man.

“Oh, no! As a matter of fact,” said Coleton, “I know it isn’t. I happen, in fact, to be aware that the artist refused an offer. However, what I want now is to buy the picture. I am willing to give the price asked, assuming it to be reasonable.” This last to maintain the character of patron. A mere clerk must not discover in the interested person anxiety, for anxiety would suggest emotional possibilities. And there were no emotional possibilities available for the exploration of Burlington House office boys.

The secretary’s secretary turned to his books, found the page, as once before he had found it in response to another inquiry, and was about to quote a figure when he looked up.

“But wait a minute,” he said. “I seem to remember——”

The pucker appeared in Coleton’s forehead.

Vaguely he was irritated by the clerk. Why should he be troubled with a vulgar disclosure of a clerk's mentality? The fellow should, in relation to himself, remain impersonal. "We had a letter from the artist this morning." He dived for a desk, searched letters, and then came forward again.

"Yes, sir. As I thought. Letter from the artist this day. 'Please note pict re sold. To be delivered to order of—of'"—he spelt out the name—" 'Messrs. Beech & Boxrider.' "

The small pucker in Coleton's forehead became a large one, a noticeable one.

"Tsh! Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, sir. There's the name perfectly clear—Beech and Boxrider."

"Solicitors, I suppose."

The young man looked to his brief again, and turned over the page.

"No, sir. Beech & Boxrider, Imperial Buildings, the advertising agents."

III

He felt it.

That was the precise form in which he characterized in his own mind his condition. Even when most disturbed he was always aware of himself—of the fact that it was *his* mind which suffered. He was never entirely detached. Like Rasselas, he could often be charmed by his consciousness of his own capacity to suffer.

And yet in a swift moment, before he had phrased

his sensations, he had had a sharp, direct—what was he to call it?—pain. Like any other man. It was absurd. It was even rather disturbing that he should be disturbed.

If this girl really chose—was really so entirely wanting in proper feeling—yes (firmly), proper feeling; if her spiritual equipment was inadequate—was his solution perfectly simple of the difficulty of the situation in which he had seemed to be becoming involved? He had *bestowed*. Yes (again firmly), *bestowed*. He had noticed her, singled her out, and his doing so meant that he had done her an honour. *She* could not do *him* an honour.

He walked out of Burlington House with an action consciously expressive of what he conceived to be the idea in his mind: pain, pain, and regretful abandonment of a quite interesting and distinctly pleasant relationship. The regret would be largely vicarious. He would be sorry for that girl, she would feel his withdrawal just when she had believed he was interested in her.

Even when he got outside and had to decide his direction, he still believed himself to be occupied with the same idea.

But the curious and perhaps disturbing thing about it all was this, that when he did set out he seemed to be walking in a direction to follow which there could have been no reason at any time, unless he were proposing to visit the very person whom he had just decided could no longer enjoy the sparsely issued privilege of friendship with himself.

CHAPTER XI

I

ON the morning of the day in which our distinguished Coleton had issued with Jovian dignity from his club—first to give what should become valuable and cherished memories to his delighted bookseller, and then to suffer the pang which is felt by all who discover the failure of a first fresh confidence—Lesley was setting out upon a journey into the unknown. To her, the City was merely the mystery beyond Temple Bar. There had been a letter that morning from Boxrider—a curious letter: “My partner has been suggesting that you agreed to sell us the picture only after you had been argued into it. He wants me to free you from your promise, and says that if I do so you will withdraw. I have told him that I will not free you, and that, even if I did, you would have no wish to withdraw. I had meant to send you the agreement for signature, but as Mr. Beech has raised this point it occurred to me that you would perhaps not mind signing *here*. You could then tell B. that you are *not* acting under pressure of any sort or kind.”

Lesley was disturbed, and the thing really was less easily dealt with than might appear. Oh, yes, she had sold her “*Girl*,” her wretched picture was

hers no longer. . . . You see to what reaction had brought her!

The fact is she had been under a spell—the spell of that young man's conviction. But the spell had faded. Spells have a way of fading in the bright light of an early morning following the day on which the magic is exerted. This thing—this Advertising—the spirit of which had seemed for that brief space to have captured her, to have entered into her and dominated her mind, had left her. And *she* remained. That was how she felt. Something had died. And without that thing, that conviction, there was nothing to support her in the idea that she had put herself in touch with a modern reality, that she had responded to a whisper of the Time Spirit. She felt bereft: in certain moods she came to tell herself that she had been tricked—tricked by that man. She saw now the character of the apparent concession he had yielded. By selling her picture she had been told she was not committing herself to a general practice; it was not to be understood that she would sell further pictures. But that had never really been the point. It was a mere shadow offered her in exchange for the substance of her picture.

Oddly enough, while she thought with rising anger that she had let herself be defeated, and while she could be hot against Boxrider, she yet waited with an odd eagerness (she thought it odd anyhow) for news of him. More than that, she began to want to see him—for only when in contact with him could she hope to recapture a conviction to support her

actions, or, rather, to destroy the intense self-disapproval now visiting her. In her newest mood she was not in any circumstances to be convinced that she had done right in selling; but if he were to talk to her again she would at least rediscover some element of drama and conflict which would seem to restore dignity and character to what, in her present mood, seemed a mere sorry reminder.

The letter she had now received seemed to her to offer her a solution of her mental difficulties. By responding to his request she would see Boxrider. Well, she did not want to examine closely the personal implications of that reflection. But she would get back some sense of character. On the other hand Beech, by his wish to free her, would stand her advocate in her new mood. There would be a battle; yes, a battle with fire and action and with force used. And who knew but that in the battle a reshaping might not be achieved of the situation in which she had the misfortune to be involved?

II

Arriving at Beech & Boxrider's she was escorted through the general office under the curious and sardonic observance of James. (Woman—young woman; which of them had got hold of *her*? He would like to know some more—a good deal more.) He was whistling, which meant that Boxrider was not in. He always whistled loudly when Boxrider was out, because he knew that, while it annoyed

Beech, his “master” on the one hand never had the courage to order him to stop whistling, and on the other refused the humiliation of appealing to Boxrider.

Mr. Boxrider was out for the moment, the visitor was told.

“But he’ll be back soon, and Mr. Beech is in now—if he’ll do.”

It may have occurred to her that there was something vaguely depreciatory in the use of Beech’s name. But she said he *would* do.

Coming to the doorway of the private office she saw Beech, that odd, over-eager creature, jumping up with an excited air of gratification and contriving to overset an inkpot in his haste. She had an idea he would always upset something in his haste.

“Oh, good morning, Miss Senior! Good morning! Come in. How do you do?” And he held out his twitching hand. She was glad she had not removed her gloves. He found her a chair close to his own—too close to his own according to an odd little idea she had—and, sitting there, she had an uncomfortable feeling that at any moment his hand might close over hers. It is really very odd how, from the beginning, she had been made conscious of something in him in the nature of a nervous amorosness. . . . She could feel his eyes trying to steal glances, feeding on her as it were, when she was not looking. His breath touched her; and there was all the time that odd, false element in the air. She had the idea that the talk—even of the more trivial

kind—was to be used as an instrument for imposing, not merely his mind upon her, but his innermost self.

“You came of course—you came——”

“Yes,” she broke in, feeling herself already speaking with an absurd nervous twitter as if he had infected her. “Yes, Mr. Beech, about this picture. There’s the agreement which I have to sign——”

“Have to? *Have to?* There is no ‘have to,’ Miss Senior. Whatever you may have allowed yourself by the eloquence——” with a kind of grimace—“eloquence of my partner to be involved in, please consider as not really binding. *I authorize*”—with a deep effort to project a smile—“*I authorize your freedom.*”

She drew away from him quite involuntarily. He was saying the thing she wanted said and—when he said it, she was not grateful.

“I think, as I made the bargain with Mr. Boxrider, I must get his permission before suggesting withdrawal.”

Beech bit the inner part of his lower lip—a characteristic trick when really checked.

“Very well.” His voice, she noticed, had been raised in key. “Very well. See him.” He got up suddenly, stalked to the door, stopped, came back, and was about to make a second bolt towards the door when Boxrider entered.

“Oh, good morning!” Boxrider spoke with a sudden pleasure. Youth, I suppose, met youth sud-

denly. It must have been the same in a garden at the beginning of the world. It was the "oh!" that counted, the "good morning" was the mere stuff of talk. She must have understood perfectly, and so, certainly, must Beech, for there came a funny little flush in his cheek. He seemed to be trying to speak, but he said nothing, and at last stood waiting, twitchingly, to see how that girl took his partner.

"Good morning, Mr. Boxrider. I came, as I said I would do."

"To sign. Yes, good!"

"Well, I'm not sure. Yes. If you hold me to it, I'll sign."

"Hold you to it?" He had been about to reach for a drawer to find the document for signature when his head shot up.

"Hold you to it? Why, of course. It was a business arrangement, wasn't it? I've just been out seeing Kingfords, who are delighted with the whole business. They think it's going to do them more good than anything put out for years—since Mr. Beech, senior——" he stopped, remembering. "I beg your pardon, Beech"—but his partner's face was now already in a flame—"I didn't mean to say that there had been a serious falling-off since you took over——"

"No, you didn't mean to say that, Boxrider. You only wanted to suggest it."

Boxrider gazed at his partner now in mere astonishment. Then he seemed to be trying to contrive a secret communication to the other man ("You're

not fool enough to talk this stuff before women"—something of that kind. "Wait till she's gone, at least"). And then he spoke. "I wanted to suggest nothing. Don't let my friend's words disturb you, Miss Senior. Mr. Beech and I are accustomed to absolute frankness with one another."

"Yes, we are," rapped out Beech. "Yes, quite true, and I will say now, Boxrider, that I have formally given Miss Senior permission to withdraw from any arrangement with us."

Boxrider looked gravely, quietly across to Lesley.

"And Miss Senior?" he said.

"I told Mr. Beech that I made the bargain with you and that I felt—I must get your agreement before withdrawing."

"Good! That settles it. I cannot give any such agreement."

Lesley nodded now coldly. "Very well. Have you the paper ready?"

Boxrider stooped again to a drawer in his desk, and as he did so there was a sudden movement across the room. The next moment the door had slammed behind the swiftly retiring figure of Beech, the noise making subtle reverberations in the minds of the pair remaining.

For a full minute Boxrider neither made a movement nor utter a word. He remained bending over his desk, his eye on a sheaf of papers. Then slowly, gravely, he looked up. He made no sign whether of satisfaction at something in the nature of a victory nor of comment at the humourlessness of his partner's performance.

He contented himself with putting forward a parchment-like sheet and then with dipping a pen.

“You will sign here, please, Miss Senior. But one moment. You must have a witness.” He rang the bell and a boy appeared.

“Mr. James.”

The boy went and James appeared. From his face he had carefully excluded every kind of expression. But Lesley, who had not seen the man before to-day, had an idea that he considered her slowly and not quite impersonally. She had a curious, remote sense of resentment of that scrutiny of his. She felt it to be a veiled impertinence, a curiosity to discover some relationship between his employer and herself. And she was angry with herself because her hand was not quite steady as she wrote the name to which the clerk was to witness. He bent as soon as her hand came off the paper, writing his name slowly and with an offensively subtle enjoyment.

“That all, sir?” He had turned without expression of any sort to Boxrider.

“That is all. Thank you, James.”

James turned and, with the same deliberate movement, went to the door. But in opening it and passing out he contrived to turn and observe again the girl sitting at the desk. Then he closed the door.

Boxrider was gathering up and folding the contract.

“That is very satisfactory,” he said, with a steadily growing energy which could be supposed by a hearer to have for its object the conveyance of

himself and his visitor into a situation of greater comfort. "I am very glad that you did not seek to withdraw."

"I—I wasn't given the opportunity," she broke in sharply.

"No, in a sense you weren't," he smiled. "You hadn't signed and so weren't committed actually and legally. But, well, Miss Senior, I exercised the moral right which I think was mine."

"And which I gave you!"

"Perhaps. But need we go on? I'm sure, when you've thought more—*still* more, I mean—you won't really mind."

"That," she said quickly, "needn't be discussed now, Mr. Boxrider, need it? I've agreed. And I agree that we need not go on. I'll say good morning."

"Oh, all I meant was need we go on discussing the question of the agreement? But I like to talk about the picture. Kingfords are delighted. They've been to the show to see it on the wall, and they say it will double their sales."

She shuddered—deliberately.

"That, I fear, doesn't interest me." She said the words before she knew. They were there to say.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Ah, well! I hope it will interest you to see the way we shall turn it out. I could get some specimens of reproduction from the people who will reproduce *your* work. Then you'd see we *should* do you justice."

“I am really not interested. So please don’t trouble. I—I don’t think I’ll wait.”

“Won’t you? I’d like you to see the way they do things. I’ll ring up and ask them to send along some specimens.”

“No, please.” She had already moved towards the door and he had to step forward to open it for her. In that small matter, as she felt, she was having her own way. He had a notion, observing her, that she was determined to have it—that to give it her was to give her a consolation.

And as she walked out of the room, the poor girl read *that* thought in his mind—and lost her triumph. He was giving her her way to console her!

All the same, out she marched, her head up! Bless the woman! Bless *all* women!

III

Her instinct was to get away. She could not discover anything satisfactory either in her day or in some of the events of the past week in which she had been involved. She was pursued now by consciousness of an essential inconsistency, evidenced not merely or so much in her mere changes of policy as in the deep, instinctive impulses which had governed her actions. By allowing these impulses in conflict to use her as their battle-ground she made it possible for her to accuse herself of failure in prerogative, and so of a lapse in dignity. A lapse? Many lapses!

She grew impatient with herself, intolerant even. She could not easily perceive any place of refuge. There she had been fighting for a principle, ready to die for it (well, starve for it, anyhow), and then by the action of a defaulting imagination, a traitorous imagination, an imagination which was entirely wanting in a sense of what was due to its owner, she had been betrayed to the enemy. She had allowed her mind to be captured by that man's glorification of his hoarding. She had let herself see the thing in his terms. Then when reaction came, when that caitiff imagination had been beaten down and she ought to have been free—when, indeed, she could have been free—she had failed to grasp her freedom. She was futile, ludicrous; she was without standpoint as well as without what the Americans called poise. She felt appallingly trivial. The whole situation was absurd, and its absurdity was the greater because not only had her mind momentarily invested it with dignity and even splendour, but it still gave it an entirely exaggerated consequence. She would have liked to have talked to a man different from these with whom she had just been dealing—somebody cool and wise.

Still thus thinking she left her bus in King's Road and was hurrying towards the flat (hurrying, yes, because the physical movement might signify attempt to escape from intellectual toils), when a voice hailed her from behind. Turning she discovered the smiling eyes of Claude Coleton.

CHAPTER XII

I

COLETON, planning to see her, was not prepared for the sudden meeting; and as for her, she felt all her thoughts pulled up sharp. For why—here *was* the wise, cool mind!

Her mind was in the condition in which the minds of women sometimes are, when the smallest impulse one way or another may involve a spiritual journey of many miles along a path from which there are no byways. Colour came to her cheek, her eyes shone. Merely reaction? Scarcely. Coleton before had stirred her; and to-day she was in the mood for him. As for the man he read her excitement and pushed his advantage.

“How very happily met, Miss Lesley Senior. I thought I was never to see you again; and at the R.A. to-day——”

“You were there!”

She was suddenly constrained. (Like a child found out was *his* complacent reflection; and perhaps she herself had some objective view of herself at that moment, and knew in what character she must be appearing to him.)

“Yes, I was there, and I am not sure”—with a contrived air of regret—“I’m not sure that I wasn’t

“sorry that I ever went.” They were practically on the doorstep. “But,” he went on pleadingly, “you won’t leave me standing here, will you? For there was something I really wanted rather badly to say, don’t you know!”

“Then”—with a little waving forward of a hand—“you’d better come in, Mr. Coleton. I expect Mrs. Graeme will be back by now.”

He had been about to say “Need Mrs. Graeme necessarily,” but he was a man who never yielded to impulse—or he believed that he never did. (Actually, of course, it was only by yielding to an impulse that he had come here at all.)

Entering the flat, she led her visitor to the sitting-room. By an empty grate which was neat with the neatness of midsummer lay Netta’s little beaded slippers—a pretty half-human touch in the midst of the inanimate room. She saw that his eyes rested upon them and then turned, looking towards *her* feet. Men were so inevitably restricted!

She had begun already to be vividly conscious of him—conscious of him in a way she had not been out of doors. It was as if the walls literally brought them within some narrow and narrowing compass. She was convinced that this effect was an achievement of his—something deliberately executed. She was, indeed, so much aware of him to-day, he was so dominant in his curious, special, subtle way (or had begun to be), that she forgot minute criticisms of him which once had occupied her mind.

She had retreated from those adventurers—those

priests of Commerce (rather unkindly she mentally left Beech beside his partner and refused to distinguish him from his environment), and her mind now was ready for help from any challenger of the spirit of Trade. And now here she was, facing one such very man. If only Coleton had known, he could not have found an hour more fortunate for any plot of his in relation to this girl.

She was bitterly conscious of futility in her conduct of her own life; she felt little and foolish, and charged herself with being highly excited about small things. Part of her trouble was, of course, that even her artistic lapse—to characterize her action as she did—was really insignificant; a storm in a tea cup. Most of us, if looking for an action promising moral dignity to ourselves, would choose a storm in the Atlantic rather than one in a cup of tea. If you are drowned then you are at least a man, a heroic figure.

Poor Lesley saw herself a fly—yet a fly that struggled, that experienced all the exertions of something larger and that suffered with the greatest.

And now here was Coleton—Coleton who could help her to feel less of a fly, to whom her problem would not only be a real problem, but a problem for something greater than flies.

“Mrs. Graeme will be in for tea, I know,” Lesley announced with just that element of constraint which he found charming. She was conscious of the fact that a man—*this* man—was alone with her in a room remote from the world. That consciousness

was in her view right and fitting. It created the atmosphere he wanted, the atmosphere in which he could breathe and move.

"Oh, we can get on very well I am sure without—"

"Tea?" she suggested quickly.

"Very well," he returned blandly. "Let us say tea."

He was watching her carefully. "You know," he went on slowly, "when I was at the Academy this afternoon I made an effort to buy a picture—a picture I wanted to possess—not because of its undoubted genuine artistic merit, but because of the great attraction it had for me."

"You mean—" she felt constrained again. "You knew the scene of the picture—or was it a portrait?"

"It was neither, Miss Lesley Senior. It was a picture of a girl whom I did not know and in whom I was not interested. My interest in the picture was measured by my interest in the painter—which, if I may say so, was overwhelming. But when I called at the office to ask the price, they told me that the picture had been sold . . . and not only that"—His melancholy voice had sunk and was slow and sad. (How absurdly her heart was beating.) "But I learnt to my sorrow that this picture, which was the expression of a bright and charming spirit—the brightest and most charming which I have ever been permitted to encounter—may I say that humbly and in all sincerity?—that this picture which had so

expressed that spirit had been surrendered to commerce."

So confused was her mind that she scarcely observed that element of unreality in the texture of the speech, that rotundity. She was still feeling the reaction from her surrender of her picture; and certainly she was in no mood to justify anything she had done, nor to criticize the quality of his talk. He stood for the things approved by what she conceived to be her static self—the self which admired beauty and shrank from the vulgar and the sordid. In her nervous apprehension she was even ready to fear that he despised her—yes, to *fear it*.

"I don't want to press"—he smiled brightly—"to press the point of my own disappointment. Because, after all, the decision of the artist isn't my business." She looked at him suddenly and gratefully, and he read her quite easily, congratulating himself now on his avoidance of the line he had thought of taking—the line of a gentle reproof. She had too much spirit to submit to a scolding. "It wasn't my business," he went on slowly, murmurously, "yet."

He dropped the word into the room and then turned to catch a glimpse of her face. She had not understood, he was sure. But she still sat there, and without leaving his chair he turned towards her. "I wonder, Miss Lesley Senior, if I may call you by a name less formal?—if it would ever be possible—" he leaned still closer, and now she did perceptibly move back her chair.

Hitherto he had kept that rigid hold upon himself which he had maintained in all his relations with women: one spoke softly in dim lights, one's hand went forward towards a conquest and found a dainty outpost waiting for capture; one whispered, drew confidences, and presently slipped away knowing that the gate into *that* country was now secured.

But to-day he found that that slight withdrawal of hers had taken him suddenly after her. Only in retrospect could he realize what, precisely, he did now. All he knew now was that he was behaving like an ordinary human man—such a man as he projected in his own books. (Afterwards he recaptured enough of his detachment to select the particular character of his own creation which most approximated to his new conception of himself—Geoffrey Stirling. And it is perhaps curious to reflect that this Stirling had always seemed to him most nearly to approximate to the general idea of a complete and admirable male. He recalled the characterization: “Vigour and beauty. . . . The sight of that figure framed in the doorway made the hearts of women. . . .” And then, “A strong man in love moves towards either a consummation of bliss or—tragedy. Stirling, from whom there seemed to emanate a spiritual vigour. . . .” Strength. A strong man swept by passion. That was Stirling and that, now, was—himself.)

He was inexpressibly thrilled. His psychology was sufficiently developed to allow of his rejoicing at his perception of his own capacity to think only

of this girl. Actually, while he believed himself to be thinking only of this girl, he was *not* thinking only of this girl but of himself. And yet he *was* thinking only of this girl. The paradox, he decided, was not a paradox at all really.

In exchanging for his old picture of himself this new one—this portrait of Stirling—he thus succeeded in preserving that satisfaction in his own temper and character which another and lesser man, allowing himself to repicture himself, might have lost.

But for the moment he was merely conscious of being a man—admirable or otherwise.

II

“Lesley—you will let me call you Lesley? . . . I have known you for so short a time. Yet you have come to fill so great a part of my life. Do you think you would let me occupy part of yours?”

She still did not criticize (if she had done so she would probably have reflected merely that he could not help talking like a book, seeing that he was always writing books). She merely drew further away.

“I don’t pretend that I don’t understand you,” she said, marvelling at her own resoluteness. “But please don’t say any more, Mr. Coleton.”

“But I mean it. You can’t dismiss a thing like this just by asking me to say no more.”

In a mood of greater detachment he could have

been distressed that she did not show greater appreciation of the fact that he—*he* was being moved by a direct and elementary impulse.

In brief flashes he still saw himself, but they were flashes such as those flashes of light which one gets travelling by railway through a tunnel when the train goes by a ventilating shaft. He was in a tunnel, knowing no more than that he was rushing forward—into the light!

“I mean it. I want you to answer me. You will let me see more of you Lesley—dear.”

“I—” But she stopped. Somebody was turning a key in the latch.

“Yes, you will,” he pleaded, drawing near. She had risen, a quick colour in her cheek.

“Say yes. No, not just that—say you’ll give me all I ask now. Say you’ll let me see you.”

“Why, yes. Of course, Mr. Coleton.”

There was a step in the hall.

“Why not *Claude?*” He had dropped his voice. (Somebody had once called it his “sticky” voice. But Lesley only heard a man, really moved to speak, speaking.)

“Claude.”

She had not meant to say it, but she whispered the word suddenly, and darted away as the door-handle turned and Netta Graeme stood there.

A sudden glow came into the eyes of the newcomer.

“Mr. Coleton? But how kind.”

If an observer had followed her from the street

he might have contrasted a heavily jaded air which had hung about her till she came to the threshold of the sitting-room with her swift brightening of eye and speech and manner. She had read the whole thing, of course.

He had come there, naturally, expecting to see *her*; he had found nothing but poor little dull Lesley to entertain him, and he had been sitting there patiently waiting. He really deserved any smiles she could spare for him now! As for Lesley—poor little Lesley! The girl's air of excitement made it quite clear to anyone of experience that she was still feeding herself on illusions. On the other hand, she (Netta) could not very well undeceive the poor child unless Lesley came to her for advice. *Then* she would do her best to be gentle. . . . But it really had its absurd, even its irritating, side. And in any case there was the man waiting for her now. . . . She sat down, then suddenly murmured something about "tea."

The tea was laid ready—a spirit kettle stand had merely to be lighted. But Lesley might have had the mere intelligence to disappear. This idea played about her mind all the time now. There was that man sitting there waiting; and the wretched girl, feeding on her own sorry little illusion, sat there too. Could not she see—or, if she did so, was she so inconceivable a little egotist that she must ignore the desires of other people whenever those desires conflicted with her own? There had been a time when she had been genuinely sorry for Lesley, but sym-

pathy had given way to impatience, and now another and stronger feeling was certainly gaining ground in her. Yet she pressed down her anger smilingly, handing the man his tea, talking follies—the dead season, the end of the picture show, invitations he had had to go north.

“Are you going away?” he asked.

“I?” She smiled. “When I go it isn’t north that I go. Two hours from London is the furthest the chain of the poor permits them to wander.”

Se did not call him “Claude”; she noticed how carefully he avoided the “Netta” before Lesley. She drew a subtle pleasure from that understanding, and even a delight in addressing him as “Mr. Coleton.” She could feel that as he looked across at her he appreciated the special quality of that form of allusion on her lips.

“Still, you ought to think of Scotland—*Oban*. Oban for two reasons: charmingly situated”—he fell easily to these feeble clichés of topography—“and I shall be staying near.”

“Most excellent reasons, of course!” This with a touch of whimsy. Netta was a mistress of the light touch.

And now, clearly, the old eagerness was coming back. Why, she might say it was in flood. First he came after her here (why *could not* that girl understand?), and now he must even have her near him in Scotland.

Presently, and yet with a clear dissatisfaction at doing so (clear to both women, as it would have

been clear to a scarcely interested spectator had one been present), he got up to go. He seemed to wait or to manœuvre a delay and looked from one to another.

Netta moved slightly—a mere indication. She would see him to the door; Lesley surely would have the sense to remain in the room. And apparently Lesley had, for when Mrs. Graeme had passed into the hall and was being followed by the man, he paused and for a moment retreated.

“My gloves. I always *do* leave something.”

Back in the room he seized Lesley’s hand.

“Good-bye. Not a final good-bye, I mean. And you’ll think of what I said and let me——”

“I’ll think—the only promise I *can* make.” She tried to smile and the next minute he was gone.

In the hall he stood smiling to Netta, lifted her hand, bowed, and opened the door.

“Good-bye.” She saw his eyes look beyond her to the half-open door of the sitting-room. A little patch of colour came into her cheeks. So that was it. That chit would listen and watch, and being a man he was afraid! He was away before she could encourage him—detain him.

But when the door stood between him and herself she was quite clear. Lesley had spoilt everything—*everything*. The silly little egotism of the girl. . . . But it was becoming a bore and would soon be rather worse than a bore.

She was genuinely sorry for Lesley—poor little deluded Lesley! What curious things women were.

How easily they ran to self-deceptions! But this particular absurdity would have to be dealt with. She did not want to be what was called "unkind," but there was no help for it. With a little tightening of the lips she walked slowly towards the sitting-room door. As she stood in the doorway she met Lesley's eyes, excited, eager, but not happy.

Netta almost forebore; but she would have to speak sooner or later, she told herself, and it would be easier now while the circumstances were fresh in the minds of each.

"Lesley, may I say something, dear?" The girl looked up suddenly and with some little ironic twist of the lips at the unaccustomed endearment.

"Why, of course."

"Don't you think"—Netta had dropped her voice and was using an accent of velvet softness—"don't you think that when a man comes to see a particular woman and a second woman is present the second woman ought perhaps to—well understand and—and—"

"Leave them?" Lesley seemed to be smiling.

"Well, yes, dear. That is what I meant."

"I don't see it myself. I suppose you were thinking of to-day?"

"Well, yes, dear. Yes. I—"

"Then I don't think it would have done any good. I'd really have been more"—she began to be uneasy—"more uncertain than I was. I didn't know what to say—I'd no idea. I don't think I like him very

much.” (Poor little Lesley! as if anyone believed *that* denial.)

“Yes, but didn’t you think that we might like to be alone together for a few minutes?”

“We?”

“Claude and I.”

Suddenly the girl sprang up. Her face underwent at once a most astonishing change; all colour had died out of her cheek.

“You—you! But—but, Netta . . . it’s absurd.”

“Absurd!” Netta’s voice rose, suddenly shrill; she, too, was losing touch with the situation. “You! Do you realize——”

“Oh, I realize—we’ve—we’ve muddled something! I said absurd because I meant I didn’t know you—you wanted him, and when he asked me this afternoon I——”

“Asked you? Asked you? What did he ask you? Don’t think, my dear child, that just because a man asks you to go and stay near him in Scotland, or rather asks you to persuade the woman you live with to go with you for a holiday near where——”

“No, I didn’t think that, Netta. I did not mean that. He asked me—yes, I suppose he meant that—he asked me——”

“Yes?”

“To marry him.”

CHAPTER XIII

I

IN the meantime Beech, flinging himself from the office and neither knowing nor caring where he went, had gone down into the street and was walking quickly westwards. His mind was of the kind which is easily blinded—blinded by a frenzy. It could not be said that he had any kind of consciousness of his surroundings as he pushed on through the streets, even that he carried with him any impression of the scene which he had just deserted. He was merely shut up with two other people—the two he had left behind him in that room: shut up in some place of darkness, thick with the atmosphere of hate; gloomy, impenetrable by the light of reason. Hate—that was it—the only vivid idea. He hated, hated—yes, hated—the woman, as a man sick with passion hates the object of that passion when she withholds herself from him coolly. A passionate rejection of himself he will bear; a mere ignoring, a withdrawal, he finds hideous, intolerable. By ignoring him she implacably excludes him spiritually from her presence; she finds him, not merely antipathetic but irrelevant; she puts him outside and leaves him there. . . . And that was what that woman had done to him. She was laughing at him. She was

ready to laugh at him when she wasn't avoiding him or shrinking from him. And she did shrink from him—he could feel it even in the way she took her hand away. It wasn't withdrawn as would be the hand of a woman who suspects that some day she will be giving it of her own accord. There was—yes, he would own it—distaste in the action—distaste clearly indicated.

It is interesting in this history of certain souls to note this quality of clear thinking in the man's despair of her ever looking at him. . . . He, at least, could not have her. . . . He could not have her; and he had never wanted a woman before . . . and now he had seen one, and he could not have her.

With sudden fury he quitted his thoughts of her for Boxrider. And now the darkness about him seemed to thicken and to close him in. Night, ultimate night. How was it that he had ever endured this man? How had he let him enter his life, gain that easy mastery, sit in yonder office mocking *him*, his partner, Beech, by his easy mastery of those clerks, those impudent creatures. . . . Yes, he cried to himself in a new frenzy, that fellow had deliberately used the staff to create in him, his senior, the sense of despite which now always oppressed him. He would not be surprised if Boxrider *paid* James to whistle in the outer office when the senior partner happened to be alone in the inner. That would be precisely characteristic of the fellow. But that was only a minor offence in Boxrider, who at all points strove to reduce his partner to the level of his clerks.

There was something else: there was this—Boxrider's easy assumption of control of that woman. What did he mean by it? (How shrill did one's *thoughts* as well as one's speech, seem to become! And it was Boxrider who mocked him, made him scream! Yes, scream! Once he wondered why the people about him didn't start away in alarm and astonishment.)

But what did Boxrider mean? Was he merely resolved to contrive a new humiliation for the partner who stood out (here Beech for a moment tried to see himself in the character of protagonist of a revolt) against the corruption and vulgarity of the age into which he had had the misery to be born? Was his insistence on that girl signing the contract intended simply as a contemptuous challenge to himself, and would Boxrider have equally insisted on her *not* signing, if he (Beech) had wished her to sign? Did Boxrider contemn him sufficiently to invent a situation in which he could inflict fresh humiliation?

But now Beech became troubled by a new emotion; a strange quality of sickness invaded his innermost heart. In a sense he had known jealousy—had always known it. His was a spirit easily made jealous. He had been jealous of small things; of the possession by others of perceptions or aptitudes denied to himself. He had been deeply jealous of Boxrider's success in control of the staff. But he was jealous now with a jealousy which entered his soul like a pervasive and deadly poison. Jealous of

Boxrider in relation to a woman. . . . Love-jealousy. It was something which consumed, which devoured, which charged him with a new flame of hate. (Melodrama? Fiction? Quite so. But here precisely is the psychology for setting out melodramas. . . . Dark figures creep out of shadows. It is night. . . . Or a hand pushes from below the curtain. . . . Or there is merely a cry at midnight—it must be midnight. . . . But it is not only people with pens projecting a puppet life who see unrealities, for whom the balance is disturbed.)

II

Beech had taken no notice of his path; but he was still pushing on westward, and coming into a block of people he had perforce to pull up and look about him. He was, he saw, in Piccadilly Circus. He thought people looked at him in vague uneasiness. They thought he was mad, no doubt. Perhaps he *was* mad. Even if he was not now he soon would be. Yes, mad! And then Boxrider would have his final laugh. Boxrider would telephone for the police and would get James into the private office to help to hold him. How James would like that! How he would smile and whistle! He shook himself free and plunged on—into Piccadilly.

So that a third man was nearing a point where two others had previously come—to the development for each of a situation of an important kind. Beech had no notion of Burlington House. He came there

by a mere accident. But there, having come, he was immediately arrested by a notice: "Last Day of Exhibition."

It was years since he had visited the Academy. The memory of the last occasion took him back to the days when he had been young enough to cherish dreams of establishing for himself some contact with things of beauty.

Years. . . . And certainly, apart from a particular reason, he would have no impulse to do other than pass by the entrance; indeed, the sight of the crowd going in and out merely increased an impatience with all that were of his kind. But an idea struck him now almost plumb. That picture. It was still hanging here. The picture which had brought him into contact—the only sort of contact he would ever have—with this girl. The picture which, indeed, had been the means of bringing him face to face with woman, the first woman who had moved him.

For one moment he hesitated. Then, with a swift half-turn, he entered the courtyard and began to ascend the carpeted stair. He knew very little of picture shows, and at the turnstile he spoke to the attendant in a sudden hot way.

"I've come to see a picture—a picture of a girl. It's—" He stopped suddenly. Did he look excited? Was there something really noticeable in his manner. "I suppose," he said, with sudden calm, "that what I want is a catalogue."

"Yes, sir. Over there for catalogues," said the man, watching the other with that curiosity, intense,

but free from nervous suspicion, which characterizes the Londoner when in contact with what seem to him odd manifestations of character.

Beech bought his catalogue, discovered that it was Room XI that he wanted, and immediately hastened thither through the crowd. On this last day of the show it was a mixed crowd. He had just enough leisure from himself to see that. Country cousins who delight in the London of August were mixed with the suburbs; while here and there Society, willing to see itself once more upon the wall, looked round upon a naïve, admiring middle-class, and found an hour on its journey through London to the North to appear in the mêlée. And so there Beech stood—the third man to have his mind and spirit, things imperishable, involved with that simple and humanly devised and ephemeral thing upon yonder wall. Its significance seemed to him to be obtruded; but he was, inevitably, in the mood to be conscious of obtrusions—perhaps to find them. He stood looking at the picture with a strange, excited glare, so that people jostling him, and catching a glimpse of his eye, decided that he was the poor wretch who had painted the thing, and who now, on the last day, still waiting for a purchaser, who was determined by the steadiness of his observation to draw other eyes to his work.

But the man himself knew and cared nothing for the men and women floating in eddies about him—those flimsy-gowned women, those men in the pleasant pallor of their midsummer tweeds. Voices spoke; and if you had listened you would have dis-

covered that "He did not send to the Academy now, and a man who knows him and knows my husband assured us that it is merely drink. And it is such a pity . . ."; that "When we were in Italy we did every picture in every gallery from Rome to Venice, and ticked off each when we'd seen it so as to make no mistake, so *we* never think anything of doing *this* place, you know . . ."; and that "What I said was . . . and *he* said . . . and so I said then, 'You'd perhaps better not come here again,' and he took the hint . . . and that's that. . . . Do look at that woman. . . . No, the one over there by the picture of Kitchener. . . . Did you ever see . . . and I'm sure she *thinks* it suits her. That kind does. . . . Whatever's the matter with that man? This one near us, I mean. He's been looking up at that picture for a quarter of an hour. He was there when I came into the room. Artist? . . . No, it's by a girl—some Lesley Senior. . . . Or is Lesley a man's name? Spelt with a 'y,' I mean. Yes, let's go and get an ice."

Not that he heard. Sound came to him as from some other planet, as if its place of origin was separated from him by some infinitude of experience. Had he examined himself—and he was in no mood to do that—he could probably have found himself believing that these other people and himself moved in separate dimensions. All he had to-day, in relation to them, was a feeling of shrinking distaste,

as if their touch, or even the mere rumour of them, contaminated.

But the hatred in him, finding outlet within this room, rather ignored those crowds; it went for the picture—the picture which hung there a symbol of his defeat and humiliation. He found himself hating the face of the girl who had sat for it; he discovered in it a coarseness, a malignancy ludicrously the opposite of the fact; but the very atmosphere which he breathed seemed to him instinct with taunts. The thought pressed that he could never have met Lesley if it had not been for that picture and that wall by means of which his partner had been enabled to discover that picture. Ultimately, indeed, it was this crowd which, by giving its support, had made possible the exhibition, by means of which alone the picture could have hung where it did. . . . But such reminders did nothing for him: he scarcely suffered them.

He merely stood there knowing himself charged with a deep consuming passion of hatred. He had no sense of tenderness for the girl; she had joined in his humiliation; and if he could have involved her, himself, and Boxrider in one devouring flame he would have done it. He stole away at last without so much as a glance for any other wall. Crossing the courtyard he turned into Piccadilly. He felt extraordinarily hot now in the sun; his lips seemed dried up; his heart kept pounding. He hurried on. Where he was going he knew not. He merely went on.

CHAPTER XIV.

I

WHEN Beech had flung out, Boxrider had shrugged his shoulders. He never over-perturbed himself about his partner; and when next morning Beech came there as usual he offered neither remonstrance nor comment. As for Beech, it seemed to the junior that while that overstrung creature was more than usually the victim of some nervous excitement, and while he seemed curiously furtive ("For all the world as if he'd been plotting," was his partner's thought), he was yet striving with a kind of energy that was almost passionate to wear an air of the normal. He talked—talked hard.

"'Tranquillity' underwear, so Bexley says, want to book up space in the 'Evening Views' for a year. That would be good business, because they take a large space. I always recommend them to do that."

Boxrider nodded. He did not say that "'Tranquillity'" underwear were contemplating this contract only after he had laboured to convince them; he knew quite well that Beech knew that *he* had procured this new business; he knew that Beech knew that he perfectly understood his partner's real thought; he even knew that Beech was conscious of

his forbearance in not claiming the credit. At any other time perception of forbearance would have angered Beech almost as much as if there had been no forbearance and the truth had been delivered blatantly. And this morning Beech merely nodded. Beech, who was only normal when abnormal . . . an excited Beech, the normal man, as he (Boxrider) conceived him, troubled him not at all. But this sane and apparently balanced Beech perplexed and even troubled the junior partner. It really seemed as if, obscure, intangible, a purpose was being fashioned by that strange febrile intelligence—a purpose which now operated the speech and actions of a man usually uncontrolled.

“D’you know, Boxrider,” said the senior partner, “I’ve been thinking. There’s a good deal of really good work which we don’t touch.”

“You mean?” Sharply.

“Publicity work, as you call it—for, well, for private individuals.”

“Why should we touch petty little things of that kind?”

“Petty? That is *your* word.” Beech spoke coldly, so that he still maintained his self-control.

“It may be my word. All the same I certainly do not think there is room in this firm for doing work of that kind. It *is* petty!”

“Really, Boxrider, you have a very singular point of view. Apparently you prefer this vulgar pushing of vulgar people’s drinks and underclothing to the”—his lips narrowed as he grew more pedantic—“the

dissemination of interesting information about persons of distinction."

"That kind of thing—I've nothing against it if it's done by the proper people. But the proper people are journalists—newspaper folk who know which men deserve attention and which don't; and who measure space accordingly. *We've* no means of sorting out the humbugs from the genuine stuff. *We're* not the people." (What on earth had Beech in his mind? Must every suggestion that came from him be inevitably futile?)

"You mean then," said Beech, "that you are opposed to our undertaking unobtrusive and—er—honourable and distinguished work which brings us into touch with Art and Learning, and—"

"Art! Learning! What have we to do with Art and Learning? And as to being opposed to your suggestion—well, I'm sorry, Beech, but I am. There."

"Very well," said the now impenetrable Beech. "No more shall be said."

Boxrider observed his partner for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders; and finally, suddenly remembering that he was due at Kingfords, he got up. He began gathering up papers from a drawer and was quickly engrossed. Beech was obviously in some odd, inexplicable mood this morning. He did not understand him. Perhaps it was the extraordinary quiet of the man that fixed the conversation in Boxrider's mind: it certainly seemed fixed. And

when later he tried to remember he found he had every word of that talk quite clear.

He got up now, in his hand the latest correspondence with Kingfords about Lesley Senior's picture. It occurred to him that Beech had not seen this letter, but he was careful not to obtrude it now. Beech was so startlingly calm this morning. . . . Boxrider was already at the door, bearing with him that conviction of an unnatural quietude, when half turning he looked back. Beech was sitting at his desk; but his eyes were now raised, and, meeting them, Boxrider discovered suddenly that they had been observing him with a strange steady half-smiling intent.

CHAPTER XV

I

LESLEY's abrupt encounter with the fact of Netta Graeme's interest in Coleton sent the girl literally staggering. She could not stand steady, she lost all notion of reality; standing there, looking at her companion, she began to believe that they were all involved in some absurd fantasy. Certainly she could discover no relief; and yet relief was at hand and came, remarkably enough, from Netta Graeme.

“Since you are so sure, dear, do not let us quarrel; there are so few things that are worth quarrelling about, least of all men. There never could be a man who was worth the drawing of a rapier—or ought one to say a hat pin?”

She deliberately brought the talk down to that lower level. She was smiling deliberately and carefully—and looking into her eyes Lesley saw there neither pain nor malice. The whole gesture of the elder woman now was that of a shrug—a shedding of an illusion—and of some less important illusion.

“I suppose I ought to congratulate you; and there was a time when I could have done so. It is odd to think that I——” She deliberately broke off, smiled as at an obscure memory, and then went on: “Yes, there was once—— But it is your turn now.”

“What do you mean? That he used once to—
to—”

“Make love to—to— My dear, there are many
‘he’s’ in the world.”

“Then you are only trying to hint things that
aren’t true. You want me to believe that—”

“I want you to believe precisely what your com-
mon sense tells you, my dear. I merely state a case.
Take a man and a woman. We will by no means
say which man and which woman. Perhaps they
are mere figures in a story by a celebrated writer
of novels. I don’t know. But take a case. A man
is always troubling a woman with his dreadfully
disturbing passions. At last, worn out by his fear-
ful importunities, she consents to receive him. But
very quickly her poor little endurance begins to
crack. He begins—let me put it gently—to tire her.
He is always contriving meetings, always standing
in her path. And she submits—though, really, she
is woefully weary. But at last even *her* submissions
end. She tries to disengage herself, and finally she
deliberately practises to be free. Yes, *practises*.
She goes forth a dowd, she troubles his inexhaustible
self-content by the things she says. And finding
that even these efforts fail, she tells him at last that
she is tired and that he must see her less often.
Find somebody else, she says. All you want, really,
is a young, fresh mind on which you can feed your
hungry egotism; he denies this, but so completely
under the woman’s domination is he that he begins
at last to accept her ideas of himself, begins even

to obey her. Find someone else. The poor man begins to try to find someone else. He makes several attempts, and at last comes back to the woman, with the plaint that he has failed. Apparently he has been—shall we say?—making one more attempt. Of course this is all merely a story."

"Yes," said Lesley gravely, "a story. When we were children we used the word as it ought to be used now."

Netta smiled calmly. "It doesn't matter very much what it is, does it? If it is a story—a story it is! But there are such things as true stories."

"Only this doesn't happen to be one."

Another shrug from Netta. "I wonder. But we shall see. I have seen too many—too many—cases, and the end of each has been that the poor woman in the story has had to let him come back and remain till she can send him off again on a new chase. If it isn't a true story we shall not see what—well—what, otherwise, we *shall*, perhaps, see."

Lesley tried to nod, to hold herself calmly. But she found that she could do nothing, only turn about and retreat. Which was what Netta Graeme probably intended.

Netta, moving quietly to her room, smiled. She could claim that she was a true invincible! How many women in face of that situation would have held their own and beaten off the attack after having first envisaged the situation *correctly*?

But those two things she had done. She had beaten off the attack; but she had seen the facts

of the position—recognized them. That, ultimately, was the astonishing thing. In the swift reaction from that easy confidence of hers she yet was able, so efficient was her mentality, to be impressed with her own swiftness of judgment. At once she had believed that girl; and scarcely another woman but would have refused belief angrily, protestingly—scarcely another woman but would have repudiated Lesley's claim. From complete confidence in one thing to an equal confidence in another thing she had passed in a flash. She was amazed at herself. But she was perfectly convinced of the absolute sanity of her judgment.

And with time for reflection she found herself collecting evidence to support that girl's claim. Lesley had been with her, when as it had seemed to herself, Coleton had shown a new persistence; and those roses. . . . Yes, *they* had been intended for Lesley. She recognized the truth now, and rather coldly admonished herself for her earlier credulity. But the depth of the wound was the greater because she had opposed no resistance to the blow when she knew it must fall. She had dropped her shield and let the oncoming knife pass home. And now? Now she grew a little pale thinking not only of what she had lost but of what she must now endure. She was troubled as one might be entering the torture chamber of an Inquisition—knowing enough of oneself to know *how* much one must suffer. She would have to sit still and treat Pain and Wretchedness and Humiliation as beloved guests—smiling upon them,

feeding them, cherishing them. She perfectly recognized that she would have to help the man. If what she had told Lesley was not the truth, if she had not on various earlier occasions sent Claude away and had him back upon her hands, she would now have to suffer him about her and accept his confidences. He would use her if he could use her, not merely as a social convenience, calling upon her to preserve certain obscure proprieties, but, if she knew anything of him, he would use her spiritually. He would still whisper to her, seek her confidence, look into her mind; and, reading her regrets, he would feed complacently, even happily, upon them; he would still expect her confessions as he expected those of all other women.

Of course, as she assured herself, Lesley was only one in a succession of these women of his. Marriage? These men, these feminists, as they liked to call themselves, could speak of marriage as they could speak of love. Whether Coleton had spoken of marriage she was ready to doubt. And, even if he had, it would be merely the coin current in the kingdoms of simplicity and small things in which Lesley moved. It would merely indicate the character of his judgment of Lesley; indeed, so she (finally) argued, if he spoke of marriage, by virtue of the paradox perceptible in the emotional reactions of that man there was indicated a certain intellectual patronage, a coming down to the girl's level. So she argued—"fondly" argued.

There would be much that she would have to

endure. But not for always, not even for long, would she have to endure at that girl's hands. He would desert *her*, whoever else he lied to; and probably if she (Netta) was patient and maintained her poise she would have him suing again before long. Yes, on the whole she swung back to that less alarming view of the situation. He had not necessarily intended all those earlier softnesses, those meetings, those passionate bestowings of hands and of roses for the mere girl. He had still been seeking her (Netta), and only by some temporary aberration had he set himself to conquering Lesley. If he won—and of course he had done that already, he always won—the time could not be far distant when he would be throwing away his winnings, the winnings being what they were. And then . . . yes, she must hold herself.

An hour later Lesley, rather white and tense, came into the room. Netta rose, moved smilingly across, lifted her lips and kissed the girl.

“There. I am sorry I was so—so crude, dear. I want to say that I wish you to be very happy. I am sure you will be.”

Lesley, who had seemed resolved, looked suddenly unsteady; but she held to what was presumably a purpose conceived in the disturbing loneliness of her own room.

“I think, Netta, perhaps we had better—perhaps I had better leave. I mean have rooms of my own.”

Only for a bare second did Netta Graeme study

in detached curiosity the other's face and manner. In that brief, aloof consideration of her rival (what a word to let pass into her mind she told herself—melodrama!), in that brief contemplation she absorbed all the facts. Intuition, in which she certainly was not lacking, did the rest.

Lesley, lying on her bed wildly scanning a situation all sunrises and flashing colours, and filled with the high and wild sweet singing of many birds, had envisaged the world on which other eyes must then be looking—a wan world in which no bird sang. In that sere world, she had argued, loneliness was the only thing one wanted—could want; a gay visitant from the other sphere of existence could only jar. . . . Therefore she must go. . . .

“My dear child, whatever for? Because I had the folly to misunderstand a situation that ought to have been plain enough? Unless you are moving from some motive of pleasing yourself.”

“But I wasn't, Netta. I was thinking of you. I felt I—I couldn't——”

“Couldn't stay here and feel that you were standing in my way? Dear child, do you suppose that I really care so much for any man as I've learnt to care for this strange girl whose lot has come to be mixed with mine? You mustn't go. I would find it intolerable without you.”

“But the position, Netta, is a little——”

“Absurd? Why, yes. Perhaps. But isn't the absurdity of life one of its consolations? No, my dear, you shall *not* go. Not.”

“But how are we to go on? Especially if——”

“If he comes here?” Netta smiled. “Surely the situation is perfectly simple! I have only to evaporate, and under the warmth of his admiration for my friend I *shall* evaporate! Now don’t begin remembering all the silly things I said two hours ago. They weren’t the real me. I suppose it was really only a bit of—of pique.”

“You mean that you really don’t care, Netta?”

“Yes.” Her voice was perfectly steady. “Yes, that is really what I mean. I don’t care. Don’t think I say this with any bitterness. The matter is simply one about which I can’t feel excited. My only real feeling is raised when you say you want to leave me.”

“Then you mean you want me to stop even if——”

“Of course. Even if anything—even if he comes here and stands solemnly waiting for me to disappear.”

“Very well, Netta. If you’re sure—quite sure.”

“I am sure—quite sure.”

And so it was settled.

Again Netta smiled, for again she had won. There she would be to watch; and always both the man and the girl would be conscious of her surveillance. Moreover—and here was a point of real value—his sense of her subtlety, of her mental remoteness, would be enormously increased. For once he would not understand—he would come up against a woman whom he could not read. And that challenge would ultimately be irresistible. Poor little

Lesley! She could say poor little Lesley again, and she smiled to herself with satisfaction in her own power of recovery. Yes! in less than three hours she had so recovered that she could say again (the facts all being different) poor little Lesley!

Poor little Lesley, with her naïve speech, her direct projection of herself—how quickly would that man tire of her. She (Netta) knew enough of him to convince herself that his enthusiasm in that quarter would die out soon enough. And then . . . ?

CHAPTER XVI

I

THE really big advertising men had that club of theirs in Kingsway. Kingsway provided a kind of monument to the spirit of modern advertising. For five years there had been that great hoarding rising in the very heart of the greatest city in history—a hoarding that rose out of the ruins of a bygone civilization: a tawdry, sordid civilization that seemed to embody the spirit of the Present triumphing over the spirit of a poor defeated, undistinguished Past, a mean little Past of crowded thoroughfares—one of them Holywell Street, of unclean memory.

Yes, and now on the spot had sprung up that hoarding covered with its lavish pictorial appeals to the Man-on-the-Top-of-the-Bus. Teas and cocoas, cheap tailoring and cheaper boots, branded under-clothing, and tonics—one and all they were submitted to the consideration of that Emperor of the Little, that monarch by whose fiat trade lived or died.

But because the Man-on-the-Top-of-the-Bus is necessarily a Gentleman in a Hurry, the appeals must be immediate. There is no time for the traveller-by to read; there is just time for him to see. And so he is shown an old fellow indescribably

bounding, if not precisely a bounder, upon the beach of Southness-super-Mare; or an anæmic factory woman standing beside a second woman whose face is visibly blossoming into life at the touch upon her lips of Kingford's cocoa; or a young City clerk who, by visiting one of a thousand depots for "Cracknall's Clothing for the Classes and the Masses," wears the air of one going even then to his club in St. James's Street; or a scene in the House of Commons where, in reply to the inquiry of a diligent member as to the accuracy of a statement, a smart caricature of Mr. Speaker delivers himself of the judgment that "If it's in *Big View* it's true"; or, finally, there is that hero of the popular imagination, that romantic figure born of this present age, that noble, comic form of the bald ancient with the spring of a happy child who feeds on Horce—Horce Power. For a glimpse not only of his fat, pink, smiling, healthy face, red coat and tartan breeches, but of the brief lyric by which his achievements are celebrated and the source of his power is distinguished, passing strangers have discovered that they *must* find time. And so they read and learn that

High o'er the gate
Jumps Happy Will;
Since eating Horce
He *can't* keep still.

Happy Will has entered into the lives of millions truly. He has brought into obscure existences the warmth and light of humour, he has become a vivid

character somewhat in the sense in which Pickwick was a character; to his day and generation he has performed a service neither small nor mean.

Behind that hoarding, with its celebration of the humanity of trade, with its reminders that a retail food, an ordinary two miles of an English coast-line, a bit of cloth—not only was something to be considered by all who must be fed or restored to health or clothed, but something intimately bound up with a happiness in merely physical things, and with a world-traffic that went ten thousand miles beyond the area of this London. Even then in this place were rising the first stones of a building which should signify those outer reaches of a world whose parts were indeed bound together by just these common things—teas and cocoas and clothes—which were signified upon the hoarding.

In this quarter, then, was, properly, to be found, surely, a place where men could meet whose task it was each day to promote these traffics. Call them what you liked or they liked—publicity merchants, advertising agents, experts, consultants, advertising managers, canvassers—they were here, and here they found their natural home.

You could meet them in the streets—Fleet Street, the Strand, or in the new thoroughfare trying to dress itself like New York and almost succeeding. There they went, easily the best-dressed men in a crowd not distinguished and, Fleet Street way, dingy and inky-looking. These men in morning coats for which Savile Row would not have blushed

with shame, coats well-shaped and satisfying a final test of being free from sag in the shoulders—neat white slips inserted under the waistcoat, trousers cut on the most modern pattern and meticulously creased—these men were like butterflies flitting amid swarms of meaner, dingier insects. Those, too—and there were many—who affected a freer style of dress, “d.-b. lounges”—as those of them who “handled” tailors’ “propositions” would have put it—were distinguishable from the dull, poorly clad passengers whom you met carrying parcels to and from St. Paul’s Churchyard; from the bright-eyed “story” hunters out of Fleet Street in their indifferently tailored drab-coloured clothes; from the drearily dressed intellectuals of that same quarter who never, since the street began, cared a stroke of a pen for the clothes they wore. (Perhaps, as one of them wrote once in passionate defence, “because we have to dress down to the kind of offices in which we are expected to work.”)

Yes, these advertising men supplied colour, dignity, even a mild splendour to ways otherwise obscure and dull enough. And so, very happily, here (“right here,” as one of them had learned from America to say) they had their club—the Proposition Club—where they met for business and discussion of what they had begun to insist was a profession and not a trade.

As was inevitable, their notions and predispositions being what they were, the club-room was the achievement of a mind modern and artistic but in-

stinctively utilitarian. There were men who, visiting the place from other worlds—journalists and others of their class, mere writers and artists—shuddered when nobody was looking. “Blatant”—that was a word one man had used; “A board-room—where’s the managing director?” had said another, and then, catching sight of Veem—the great Veem who “handled” (they all “handled” everything) the largest publicity “stunts” in the world—had added, “Why, of course.”

Looking at the faces of these men, an observer got an impression of a certain uniformity in spite of the enormous physical contrasts. Facially they suggested the American type. They shaved clean and with particular care, not neglecting the back of the neck; they liked gold in their teeth, and you certainly never saw a carious tooth in the head of one of them. They were, in their own speech, “efficiency merchants,” and an unstopped tooth would have been the first mark of inefficiency. It was as though they were resolved that even the mere subsidiary forthshowings of themselves should demonstrate that completeness of purpose, that certainty that nothing had been neglected, which was instinct in them. Well-cared-for bodies, well-fed faces (“fed on the best,” as the farmers have it), well-tailored, and well-groomed, they gave you the idea that, in another phrase from that dictionary of theirs to which they went for all the words of their specialized speech, they handled the “big stuff.” And their manners confirmed the report which their ap-

pearance conveyed to you. They talked like men who thought in terms of never less than four figures. They could tell stories, take and give a confidence, or look deep into the fire in mere silence—and yet do all with a carefully cultivated gesture, a certain ample air which inevitably impressed and almost as inevitably brought business.

These men talked shop. The club was there for that purpose. But there were days set apart for talking shop in a general way, and here one afternoon you saw men dropping in to hear that new chap Boxrider. He had really put Beech's on its feet again. There were men there who had hoped to see Beech go under with a consequent passing of the Kingford connexion to themselves.

“But he's only begun,” said Gowing, who managed the department for the “Evening Post,” to the great Veem—who was so big that he liked to hear everybody praised. (He had nobody to fear, and when you have nobody to fear you have leisure to love.) “He's going a long way, is that fellow Boxrider—a very long way. I find, myself, that I have to get up before I go to bed to be up early enough for him, and yet the odd thing about him is that he isn't a mere pouncer. He has an air of being reasonable. No, he's not smooth. But he's a knack of conjuring visions. We'd always been on the dignified tack, no block illustrations for our advertising—as we didn't let them into our news. Then he comes along. ‘We've never done it,’ I say.

‘Why not?’ he wants to know. ‘Why,’ I answer, ‘it is a tradition of papers of our kind. We appeal to the upper middle-class. The trade which is done by our advertisers is almost all done in the West End and Kensington.’ ‘Well,’ says he, ‘you’re wrong, and sooner or later your rival, the “St. Stephen’s Gazette,” will do what I want *you* to do. Then you’ll have to follow, and you’ll lose the credit which is always earned by the pioneer.’ ‘Why don’t you go to the “St. Stephen’s Gazette” people then?’ I said. ‘Because,’ he answers, ‘I’ve been told, and I’ve made it my business to confirm the tale, that you have been selling nearly twice as many a night as they do. Only during the last few weeks they’ve been gaining on you. You come in with me.’ Well, as you know——”

“He persuaded you. Yes. I think we all knew that you’d changed your line of business, though,” with a chuckle, “I didn’t guess he’d cajoled you into it.”

“No, it isn’t cajolement. There’s no trickery about the fellow. That’s what is so odd. He’s really straight. He gets business *because* he’s straight. That’s what is so curious according to some people’s ideas.” By that last clause Gowing adroitly saved himself from the implication of being one of such people. “He seems able to think of a proposition which is really sound, really big; and then he simply puts it before you and it speaks for itself. He drives a bargain, of course. But you discover when

you've gone into the proposition that it's going to do something for you as well as for him. He's got a good name, has that young man."

"Then why don't we have him giving us a paper on one of our Wednesdays?" suddenly demanded Veem.

And that was how it came about that Boxrider was announced to speak on "Art on the Hoardings."

The young man himself was not displeased to oblige. Here was an acknowledgment that he was getting on. And his audience would include men who had enormous contracts to give out. (Kingford himself was to be there by invitation.)

And so there he came, spoke with a certain freshness and ease which pleased the older men while irritating his own contemporaries; and, arrived at his peroration, he was heard declaring—

"The hoardings, gentlemen, are the poor man's picture gallery. Art influences mind and morals. If you give the poor man, as some of you are doing, rotten art—by which I mean bad, cheap drawings—you're giving him rotten morals. I'm not going to mention any particular atrocity, but you can see one by merely going outside and round the corner into the Strand. But *I'm* going to release a picture that will give you an idea of what really good art is—"

"Your idea?" somebody interrupted.

"No, sir. Not my idea merely. There is a standard, and I claim the picture reaches the standard. It was good enough for the walls of the Academy." (He got applause here. He had won that point—for

like all business men, these advertisers have as much of that over-respect for the official recognitions of art or literature as they have for the young man who calls himself, if he wants to, B. A.).

“Yes. Good art. That’s necessary. And your picture must be a fair statement of your claims. It’s not only dishonest, it’s stupid to put on the market (say) a feeble tonic and then show a world of fainting men and women transfigured by the stuff.”

“There are plenty of such things—there *have* to be,” objected a young critic.

“Yes,” said Boxrider, “there are. And I wouldn’t handle one of ‘em with india-rubber gloves on. And as to their having to be—where’s the compulsion?”

“Business.”

“I disagree, sir. I claim I can do business for my clients and do it well. But there’s a better stunt than any that any of us can get up. There’s something that fetches the people more quickly than we can ever hope to do, and that is value for money. You won’t beat that.”

“And what about your new picture?”

“Oh, that’s value for money!”—he looked across at Kingford and laughed—“and it advertises value for money. When you see it you’ll admit that, I think.” He looked suddenly at the man who twice had cut in. “Even Mr. Cosmos will admit that, I think.”

A smiling face, subtle and Oriental, with the inordinately bright eyes shining full upon the speaker,

seemed to consider, weigh, and measure. A minute later Boxrider had left the little platform and the meeting had broken up.

It was twenty minutes later that he was making his way to the street when he heard steps behind him.

“Ah, Boxrider!” said a voice.

Boxrider shrugged his shoulders. He didn’t like Cosmos. He had always avoided the man. He could remember a time only a year ago when Cosmos had no use for him, pointedly ignored him.

There had been a change since then. Boxrider had something to give, and Cosmos was always looking for people with something to give.

He hurried down the steps now, spruce and with that slow subtle smile which he reserved for those from whom he wished to take.

“May I have a word with you, Boxrider?”

“Why, yes.”

“Well, then, look here. What about this new Kingford stunt of yours? I hear you’re putting your shirt on it—for romantic reasons.”

Boxrider turned full upon him. “You think yourself funny, don’t you, Cosmos? Well, I don’t think you are. See?”

Cosmos’ eyes glinted, but he contented himself with a nod and a smile. “Yes, I see. But don’t distress yourself, my dear friend. I want to talk business. This Kingford affair. What about taking my front page—on a contract.”

“Nothing doing.”

“Why not? Kingfords used to take our space regularly. Look here, Boxrider, I know there’s no good in saying come and have a drink. You’re not that kind of man.”

“No,” said Boxrider with an ironic smile. “No. I don’t think it would be much good in your asking me to come and have a drink.”

“All the same, why don’t we seem to do business?”

Boxrider had halted. He had the air a man has who proposes to end an interview to which he is the unwilling party.

“Do you really want to know why we don’t do business, Cosmos?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Then I’ll tell you. It’s because you charge for a circulation of five hundred thou. a day, and I don’t believe you’ve got one-half that number. You say you always used to do business with Kingford. I dare say you did. But you’re not going to any more. It’s my business to look after the interests of my clients, and I’m not going to waste their money.”

“You’re not, eh?”—a darkness had come into the face of Cosmos though he smiled still—“you’re not, eh? You refuse to accept the figures which I’ve shown myself perfectly willing to give you in confidence?”

“Yes, I refuse. And that’s why. I refuse because they are given ‘in confidence.’ When you see fit to publish a chartered accountant’s certificate of sales

you can give me a call. Till then, as I've said, there's nothing doing. And good day to you."

So that the other could not hold him a moment longer in talk he set off at once. For a moment it seemed as if Cosmos would detain him. But he was well into his stride, and a moment later, reaching the Strand, he was still unmolested.

His humour certainly was not one of the best. Cosmos always irritated him; but what angered him most was the consciousness that he had shown irritation—that the fellow had the power to make him show irritation. Of course he had been impertinent—grossly so. There was a story going about . . . That picture . . . oh, yes, he could imagine the character of the story. A girl. . . .

He didn't feel inclined to go back to the office. He wanted to rid himself of that sense of irritation with which Cosmos had so lavishly provided him; and, like most Londoners with a design to win freedom of mind, he turned towards the Embankment.

The bosom of such a river as the Thames or Mersey offers a spectacle healing and refreshing. The sight of it suggests Access—access to whatever the wide world has to offer by way of comfort to the troubled heart and restoration to the weary spirit. "There go the ships!" Yes, and with them goes the mind made quick and stirred to new adventure by that truly inviting spectacle. Those ships with their promise of delivery into the freedom of oceans divided from oceans by lands where men lived their

troubled lives; those ships with yet their hints of an ultimate landing upon the little quays of remote places of the world—yes, those ships draw us away out of ourselves and into wider liberties. Boxrider, a little unskilled in disentangling his own emotions, a little conscious of the mystery of his own psychology, yet knew because before he had experienced the value of the sight of the river.

His calm recovered, he began, as his way was here, to dream. The buildings opposed to him from the south side of the river, to his thinking, offered a spectacle of dignity, even of distinction; for without being an artist, he had the mind to see that whatever most clearly presents the idea of the thing for which it stands has beauty; and that, therefore, these shabby warehouses, with the dingy little lighters swinging below them, make a truer picture of the thing which they signify than would a newly set up pile of granite and plate glass. It was made clear to him that what men called business was no mere detail of life, but an essential quality in Life's reality—something that ran through it. He had wondered sometimes before why so many men, the business of the day over, felt that they must find some occupation—something they called a “hobby”—“to take them out of themselves,” that is, out of that area of consciousness in which their business was present with them.

To him, Trade—first the setting, and then the maintaining in motion of the springs of commerce,

was an endless preoccupation. Money? No, he did not want money—that is, money was not a primary good.

What he wanted, what he got, was a part in one of those great games going on in the many sections of life's playgrounds. He was playing a game, and he let his mind go on running upon that game. Golf? Golf did not attract him; it was merely a feeble shadow of the great spirit of competition moving in the bigger game. Playing golf as a distraction in the midst of the game in which he was involved would be like an England player at Lords running from the field in order to play halma in a corner of the pavilion.

And idling here (idling? Well, using the term as some detached observer, watching him, might have used it), his mind still ran on visions of some commercial supremacy. He knew himself to be in one of those moods in which he conceived of new things. He always liked this Embankment, too, because of the quickness of its life. The genius of London having set up many narrow ways, and altering them little to conserve the new, growing, and highly vigorous traffic of these latter times, thought again when there was the Embankment to build; and so, to-day, only in the Mall does the busy life of London travel as quickly as it does along the Embankment. The trams are unimaginative enough, they live perpetually in a groove; but all the petrol vehicles, even the dingiest and most ancient, seem, when they reach the Embankment, to wake up. “Hello!” they seem

to cry, "now for a sprint. I never had a chance till now, but I see myself doing something really good to-day. So here goes."

Taxis and drapers' vans went by in flashes. And now, while he went slowly upon his way, a small, compact, smooth-running van shot past and he read the golden sign of the "Evening Times." Evidently the six-thirty was out. He had always liked these newspaper vans best of all. They seemed to signify, by their speed, the very genius of the Press. News, and News against Time. A ruler might be killed in the hills of India while he (Boxrider) was having tea there in Fleet Street, and he need only to dawdle a little and then to come out here upon the Embankment to know what had happened eight thousand miles away. . . . His satisfaction in the experience of seeing that van to-night kept him for a moment from appreciating the message of the contents bill—a message which he had, nevertheless, subconsciously collected. But now the letters on the sheet hanging behind the almost vanished car began to burn out before his mind:

"Our greatest Courtenay for America."

He considered the words gravely and certainly without any active impulse to a conclusion. . . . Courtenay—held to be greater than Gainsborough! . . . Courtenay . . . America . . . yes . . .

II

He did not think any more about Courtenay. His

mind had flown back to another artist—a living artist—with long, brown fingers. . . .

He did not think any more about Courtenay till, diving into the Underground at Westminster, he bought an evening paper. It was then that he got the “story”; and from the “story” it appeared that the picture was only possibly going to America. It was to be offered for sale.

A journalist looking for a story had found one here. “Keep the Picture,” he began to shout until, presently, he made England shout the refrain. But in the meantime he was shouting in the ear of Boxrider.

It is highly probable, indeed, that in those two intelligences now brought into contact—that of the writer and the reader—it was Boxrider’s which dominated. His was the originating mind, the mind which envisaged a new creation, a sudden swift possibility; which was first expectant and then confident of some new reality. What had before been mere print passing into Boxrider’s mind, took on vitality and became alive.

“Courtenay’s Greatest”—a bold caption. To the first, the journalist, there was here something which he had been taught was a treasure more precious than the gold which could buy it. So he had been taught and so he believed. To the other, however, the thing was to be considered in terms far other—in terms of his own construction. Somebody had once called a new world into existence to redress the balance of the old. But here was a man ready to

take from the old world a thing of beauty and make it a torch in the service of a hastening new world, in too much of a hurry to see what it must nevertheless be forced to see . . . unless something great enough could be held before them. Why not the greatest—even Courtenay's greatest?

CHAPTER XVII

I

BOXRIDER had fixed a day for the “release” (he liked this new lingo of the new commerce) of the Kingford picture; but of that he had said nothing to Lesley. She had returned the proof he had sent her with scarcely a comment. But that idea which had been filling his mind (to his own astonishment) was now beginning to be a spring to his actions. He would seek her out. . . . Yes, and the release of the picture gave him an excuse for doing that.

He found the street—marvelling a little at a certain poignancy of sentiment which he discovered in himself as he observed again the surroundings of his approach. He realized this much, of course—that what he saw—this mere street (as once he could have called it), the grey stone doorway of those “mansions”—had never been seen by him in any but a mood of excitement. Even when first he had come here he had come in pursuit of an unknown who could give him something of true value to his job—something which, delivered to his hands, afforded him a chance to achieve. And he had gone away with a vision of her. And with that vision, twice since, he had returned.

Perhaps, too, even on that first occasion he had

had a premonition; *did* men get these things? But, whether or no, here he came again with the vision before him moving him now with no disguise from that once over-alert consciousness of his.

He wanted to see her. Her picture? For the first time he acknowledged that the picture had ceased to be directly relevant, important.

But when he met the eyes—quiet, curious, searching—of Netta Graeme, he was for the first time vividly conscious of what his mood must have been and now was.

“Miss Lesley Senior? She is out,” with a smile which he did not understand. “She isn’t at home a great deal now—naturally.”

“Naturally?”

“Oh! I mean naturally now that there is a man—shall I say an official man?”

“Official man. You mean she’s going to——”

“Going to be Mrs. Claude Coleton—if one need put things like that. Yes.”

“Claude Coleton? The man who——”

“Writes novels which I’m sure you would never read, Mr. Boxrider? Yes. But here I am keeping you on the doorstep. Won’t you come in?”

“No, thank you. I think I’ll be going on. I came really about the picture.”

“Oh, yes! I don’t think, though, I’d bother Miss Senior about the picture, if I were you, Mr. Boxrider. She’s rather—well—rather against that particular picture. Claude—Mr. Coleton—has been admonishing her.”

“What’s he got against it?” burst in Boxrider. As soon as there was a man he could deal. It was these women. . . .

“Oh, don’t ask *me*, Mr. Boxrider!” She was observing him closely, doubtless enjoying so many things which her trained intelligence (trained, that is, to work in this particular field) could measure and appreciate. She had seen at once the sudden modification of manner, the turning aside of the on-rush which had been visible in him as he had first taken in her hints. Malicious? No. She had nothing against Boxrider—she could not possibly have had anything. Perhaps, indeed, there was already forming in her mind an idea of another kind—an idea in which he was presented to her as something far other than the objective of some small part of her malice.

But she did not want him standing there thrusting on her the defence of Claude Coleton, and when he demanded further to know “What is the use of going on raising objections? She’s sold the picture; I’ve refused to let her withdraw, and the thing will be out at once,” she merely smiled.

“*You* have not been in love yet, Mr. Boxrider,” she said, with bright, new malice all the same. “But lovers are kittle kattle. Their tongues run easily to criticism! And Mr. Coleton, you know, rather specializes in condemnation of your profession. But won’t you come in?”

“No.” He said now, quite definitely, that he would not, and he turned from her in something that,

on *his* face, usually so smooth and alert, looked like a confusion.

He went away quickly, wiping out memories as well as he could, trying to restore these streets in his mind to what he conceived to be their normal air—their appearance apart from his special consciousness of them. He was like one who enters a room empty after a festivity and who seeks to reduce it to the commonplace of order again.

So there was another man! He was inclined to reprove an incomparable stupidity in himself in that he had never troubled himself with the reflection that there was likely to be another man—perhaps many such. Because he had never thought of that dark possibility, he had never envisaged a moment such as this. He had been content to go forward to what Fancy had suggested would be a happy climax, and to await the arrival of that climax with a proper patience. It was thus that he had always awaited the successive climaxes to events of his quite ordinary career.

But now he blamed himself. Oddly enough, he began by condemning himself merely for inefficiency in the conduct of what, as he now discovered, was an essential business of his life. Love! Why he didn't know that he had ever consciously spun the word in his mind. He went to see this girl, and when he was not with her he thought of her—though, as he assured himself, in no particular character. He was conscious that she drew him, but he had never considered in what he was involved when he let himself

respond to her attraction. And because he had been careless he found himself suddenly involved in difficulties that were the greater because they were presented so suddenly.

He had mechanically begun his journey back to the office, and presently was walking the Embankment and meeting the evening tide of human kind flowing out of the City to the south and west. He was, he might have reflected, going against the current.

He turned at last towards the Strand, and from mere habit his eye travelled across the thoroughfare to the great hoarding. He saw there things familiar, in legend and colour and design; and then it was that he discovered something new—something that stood out—a picture that he recognized with a flame of excitement and that drew him at once across the street until he could stand close enough to read the name of the painter: “Lesley Senior.”

Then he stood there, his eyes shining, his heart beating in an excitement that he refused to acknowledge more than half explicable, looking up at her picture. And having seen her picture, a moment later he saw something else.

II

Brightly, lightly, maliciously, Netta Graeme, hating to speak, had spoken truth. Coleton *had* moved. (Coleton himself, still a little confused in spite of the

subtlety even of his happiness, would probably have said that he had not moved, but had *been moved*.)

As for Lesley, the young woman was immensely impressed by the splendour of her lot. There may have been moments of uncertainty: these moments had passed. She was happily assured. She saw Claude Coleton in terms of a new conception—the conception of a great and distinguished figure in the history of his time, one who certainly came down to her, who most astonishingly was ready to be interested in her and to give her his devotion. But there can be no doubt of this that, being woman, the discovery that Netta Graeme had bestowed her heart in that quarter and had believed the man hers gave Claude a wonderfully enhanced value in Lesley's eyes. Of Netta, with her rather flower-like beauty, her daintiness, she had always been a little envious. Considering herself in confidential mirrors she would sometimes turn a little conscious of some obscurely suggested homeliness in her figure: how ungainly, immature, she must look beside Netta.

And now she had been preferred to Netta! True, her satisfaction had been checked and almost turned as a result of that first encounter with the other woman. Her happiness seemed blotted; between herself and the sunshine suddenly beginning to pour down into her life the gloom of that other had seemed to rise like a bank of vapour. She was numbed, her world darkened; but only for those first two hours in which she had been woefully conscious of Netta in the character of the disappointed. Coming back

and ready to yield, to be generous, she had been relieved (and perhaps a little chagrined!) by the other woman's calm.

She tried now, did poor Lesley, to interpret herself to herself—with the inevitable result. Like every woman engaged upon that perilous task she discovered in herself the most astonishing paradoxes—or rather a regular series of them. There she was rejoicing in her victory, but troubled because she had won it at the expense of Netta's unhappiness, but troubled again because Netta's unhappiness seemed to be vanishing, but troubled once again because the fact that she was troubled because Netta was not more unhappy disclosed in herself something obscure, even terrifying, something at which she shuddered and that she tried to veil.

She ran away from herself at last—into (metaphorically) the arms of Claude Coleton. For that refuge remained: he, this man whom women loved, loved her.

“Poor Lesley.” Netta had called her, meaning blind Lesley. But she was not as blind as that. There were many things that she could see. His hold upon women, for instance. And that hold being what it was, she half-envisioned the likelihood of there being a certain reciprocity. *That*, indeed, seemed inevitable. He could not take without giving something: there was an exchange in these matters as in everything else. But she discovered, with the eye of the woman loved and beginning herself to love, that in her presence the man could not main-

tain his detachment. In spite of himself she did draw him, and tasting that power she wanted draughts of it. *She*, the demure, waiting rather breathlessly! She was ready to do much more now, and she astonished herself by the character she discovered in herself.

Again here was astonishment that there could have been a moment when her will was fluid enough to allow her to surrender the picture when Claude would have had her refuse to do so at all costs. Interpreting herself busily now, she decided that she only began to stand definitely for Claude's prejudices when a certain quite clear development had taken place. His lavish attention she had appreciated, but it inspired her with no definite intent in relation to him; she even saw herself merely one of a number of women in whom he showed interest. But that sudden perception of something in his eyes as he looked at her, that discovery that there was a moment in which this man could forget himself, forsake his pose, come to her feet, while it overcame her with an astonishment momentarily numbing to her senses, wrought in her a change which seemed to go to the roots of her being. He had been to her an objective personality: now because, for a moment, he had looked at her with eyes of love—had shown himself *dependent*, had flung himself rather than looked down—she had drawn him within herself. The objective personality was now, for her, a subjective one: he was part of her experience. Whether for ever she would love him or not, at the

moment he loved her, loved her as any other man might have loved her. She was his woman. And being that, suddenly her spirit went out against a world that could withstand him.

Hence against the man who had tricked (her word now for that transaction of the picture) her into perpetration of her offence against the newly beloved Claude, she cherished a sufficiently warm enmity.

III

She was to meet Claude to-day on his return from a week in Scotland. House-parties—he rather affected house-parties, “with breaths of London in between,” as he put it. Now it was to be “with breaths of you.” He meant to take her up the river.

She had agreed to meet him at Paddington, and when she came into the big, cool station, crowded with West of England holiday makers, she saw him standing by the bookstall. Most men of his profession, she imagined, gravitated to bookstalls in railway stations. For a moment she had opportunity to consider him. Yes, there was that Grecian beauty of outline which had first attracted her—a man physically splendid, no less than intellectually. She told herself—as young women, mentally conditioned as she, will do—that she looked at him with perfect detachment and yet found him better than anyone else in the seen or imaginable world.

Well, but now suddenly he discovered her, and im-

mediately a certain static quality of pose left him; his melancholy eyes shone with the quick feeling within him as he came forward, clearly a lover with all other women forgotten.

“My dear, how admirably punctual. We can go along to the train now if you like; though I’ve got seats and have wired for a punt to be ready and for lunch to be put on board.”

She smiled. All women who are forced by circumstances to do things for themselves like nothing so much when opportunity offers as to have a man who does things for them; they have then a sense of well-being, of a proper conformation of their life to the plan of Nature.

“I’m sure you’ve arranged everything. You know I can’t imagine you forgetting anything or getting into—a muddle.”

He smiled. He was pleased, and, oddly enough, perhaps the pleasure wasn’t complacent: it was genuinely the pleasure of the lover gratified that the woman of his devotion approved him.

“No, I don’t think I’m likely to forget. It is, as a matter of fact, a little pride of mine that I’m efficient.” He looked round the station suddenly. “I always think that a terminus station like this after a few years gets a sense of the character of the particular country it serves. I don’t mean merely that here you’ll hear good Devonshire spoken, while at Euston you hear Lancashire, but that there is, or has become, such a general sense of—say of Cornwall, that you can smell its sea, look into its coves,

scent its moors, merely by standing and half closing the eyes."

She liked to hear him talk. She wasn't in the mood to-day to examine the texture of the talk itself or to ask herself whether it was a degree too "literary." As a matter of fact, the man, as one of his intimates had once put it, "did rather try to talk like an occasional essay."

"Tell me where to find myself now," she said, preparing to close her eyes.

He was about to answer, when, looking above her head behind, he paused with a motion of distaste.

"Let us go to our train," he said, rather suddenly. "Just when one is ready to dream, one has to submit to have a sight like that thrust upon one. Railway companies are, I suppose, commercial undertakings, but—" She had turned quickly, almost in alarm, to discover what had troubled him, and found that it was a distant wall on which hung pictorial advertisements. Very slightly she coloured. She perfectly understood what was in his mind, but she said nothing, merely following him through the gate and taking her seat in the train.

In a moment or two, however, he recovered his mood; and the train, moving out, took with it not only a sufficiently complacent lover, but one with no thought for the more paltry annoyances of life.

IV

In the train on the return journey she found

enough leisure to tell herself that there were days that shone glorious for ever across the wastes of memory, and that here was one such day. She leant back, half-luxuriating in her possession of him. Possession: she made that word definitely appropriate to the case. He had shown himself the lover; and if an over-complete lover, she was in no mood to criticize or examine the causes of this experience of him. She could even value the fact of that experience and delight in a conception of this man as a lover turning from all others to herself.

Quitting the station they turned southwards, so as to walk through the Park. There was a mild evening breeze blowing, meeting and touching their faces as they moved on slowly beside the dried turf where so many of the weary and broken now lay sleeping or resting.

“We are surrounded by who knows what spiritual tragedies,” he murmured, waving a hand towards the men lying everywhere about them on the parched grass. She was in no mood to think him sententious, and the quick raising of her eyes to his, in absorbed and therefore undisguised admiration, encouraged him. He seldom lacked such encouragement. As long as he could discover in her that quality of passive devotion to himself, he could himself maintain some kind of passivity. And passivity permitted detachment. He could be critical even of his own speech. “I am sometimes ready to turn and run.” He wished a moment later he had said “flee” as connoting a suggestion of greater dignity. “I feel

I cannot bear to see them, to read them, to imagine from what place they have come and to what they go back. And yet one knows not how to do anything for them."

"I suppose," said Lesley, feeling nevertheless a little uneasy in thus being forced to display her meagre economics, "that what they want is better-paid work. They wouldn't then be so terribly enclosed by their surroundings."

He held up a hand. "No," he declared, "I am against this idea of helping these people by giving better wages." He liked to hear himself in his character of director of social studies. Moreover, he had subtle approval for the capacity he was able still to discover in himself for a deliberate suspension of the function of the active lover.

When he might be touching the strings of emotion in this girl, here he was addressing himself to her intellect—or at least (for he did not choose to think that at any time she was capable of confining her relation to himself to the character of an intellectual relationship) to an emotionalized intellect: a mind warmed by love the better to take the impressions he gave.

"I am," he continued, and there was nobody to raise a laugh by crying "Pontiff"—"I am utterly against higher wages as a cure. Such wages would not improve them. It is not their pockets but their minds that want filling. I was talking to a man at the club. 'We want a trade boom,' he said. 'Pos-

sibly,' I answered. 'I wonder.' For really, such a boom isn't an unmixed blessing. I apologize for the cliché, let me substitute an 'unimpaired blessing.' Such a boom means ostentation, vulgarity, the obtrusion of trade; and I would do much to retard that obtrusion. We cannot go for a single walk to-day without being reminded that somebody wants to sell something. Shops? I don't mean shops, I don't mind shops—provided that they don't advertise themselves in the way they do to-day. I don't even mind patent foods and things of that kind—provided their manufacturers are content to sell them across a counter to such as want these things and know about them.'" She might have asked how they were to know without being told; but in her present mood of giving she was in no condition to put such questions to-night.

The question, all the same, may have written itself down in some corner of her mind. At the moment, in a mood to idealize, she was content to listen to his words with every impulse to criticism suspended; her mind lay idle as, earlier in the day, their boat had lain in the midst of the stream while they had absorbed beauty and atmosphere. Whether she was entirely unaware of the fact of her present passivity is to be questioned: yet she walked beside him with no challenges on her lips, and he went on:

"The old days when each man worked for himself, when there was no co-operation—those must have been the best days, the days of true happiness. I'm

sure of it. Days when there were no trade booms and nobody wanted any; and when there were no advertisements."

Even at that she scarcely jibbed. She could not believe the words to be aimed deliberately at her: she let them go.

They had walked on until they found themselves in the Mall. By what means impulses are directed will not be discussed here. She was never prepared to discuss why she said, suddenly, "Let us go on. Let us cross the city boundary. I love London at this time of year and at this hour. I think you really catch her colouring." He frowned at an artist's thought while approving her wish to keep him. "And we could easily come back along the Embankment right to Chelsea."

He agreed, and they continued to walk east, continued . . . which means that these two marched inevitably towards a point involving an experience which, to possess the special character that actually it was to have, involved another than themselves.

Coincidence? We must dismiss some fairly useful prepossessions from our minds before we subscribe to the use of such a word. Upon occasion a mind will provide the impetus for another mind and provide it at the appropriate moment, that is, the moment calculated to be the right moment—the zero—for starting a movement which shall lead to a certain conjunction. And so here went the pair towards that inevitable scene (inevitable in the terms, at least, of a perfectly respectable philosophy).

Passing under the Admiralty Arch and coming into Charing Cross, they paused. To right of them, in Whitehall, like a picture framed, save for the top-most side of the frame, by the ascending darkness of the street, stood out a glimpse of the Clock Tower with Big Ben, not yet luminous, above. The relevance of that reminder of the fact of Time must inevitably be suggested in the circumstance that it was precisely at one certain moment that a conjunction of three must happen at a particular spot. But these two must first move a little further east. And so into a Strand shuttered save where here and there a late-keeping tradesman still asked for business, they moved slowly, meeting the flagging human current which still ran out of the City.

Coleton found himself ready for sentiment. A permissive sentiment was, he always tried to tell himself, the only kind which he could experience. He *allowed* sentiment to play. But, equally, he could forbid.

“It was near here,” he began to murmur, “that . . . you first made me feel——” He let the words fade.

She nodded and smiled and nodded again. The Women’s Reform Club was quite near. There had been that escort of his to the car. Even then she’d known.

Women in love attain a certain interlude of detachment sometimes when they come again to the spot where first they believe they convinced themselves that the man “showed signs.”

“Yes,” she smiled again. “Yes, Claude.” (She didn’t say “Claude, dear.” She never said “Claude, dear.” She thought that probably endearments did not come naturally with her.) “Yes, I remember.”

“If you do, can you doubt how *I* remember?”

He liked the sound of that. He must put it into his next book! Would he remember the words till he got home or must he make a note now? . . . Yet all the same there was *something* spontaneous.

She smiled again—happily; and then a moment later grew fearful . . . yet for no reason whatever that she could discover. It was only now that they had come within a pace of the Strand-Kingsway junction and of the great hoarding. . . . And Box-rider, looking away from the picture of Lesley Senior’s “Waiting,” discovered that there was something else for him to see. And Lesley, standing back suddenly, uneasily, disturbed by that grim confrontation, as it seemed to her in her present mood, of her sin against her lover if not against Love itself, in stepping back and looking up with swift deprecating gesture, became aware of that very man who, according to her new conceiving of the circumstances, was responsible for her black offence. She looked with a sudden air of distaste, nodded coldly by way of a bow (to which he responded with a step in her direction), and then turned to Claude Coleton as if not only to deprecate his criticism but to do two other things—claim his safe conduct out of this place, and stress her relation to him before the observant eyes of that other.

Coleton, who had seen the picture and had, visibly, disapproved, looked at Boxrider in some curiosity. He had no notion who this rather determined and somewhat crude-looking young man was. He did not particularly want to know at that moment; he certainly did not desire acquaintance: some picture dealer perhaps, or some other individual concerned with that absurd existence from which, as he hoped, he had rescued this girl of his (of his—he was always and inevitably proprietorial). He certainly had no notion of the precise character in which the young man's relationship stood to Lesley. And he was for moving off—even though he could not forbear an indirect and comminatory shrug and a word of comment, as his eye considered the picture.

“It is at least pleasant to think, my dear, that this is the last occasion . . . though I shall quite dread the sight of a London hoarding for quite a long time to come.”

On that note of rather feminine protest he was leading her away when Boxrider came forward.

“Good evening, Miss Senior. I hope you like it.”

He spoke as if moved by some queer dominating emotion which he had not succeeded in controlling—perhaps had not tried to control.

Coleton paused, considered the other up and down, and with what may have been intended to appear an insolent curiosity; then he glanced at the girl as if demanding that she should clear herself of an obscure complicity in the affairs of this young man. Appealed to thus by both men, Lesley spoke.

"If you really ask my opinion, Mr. Boxrider, I will give it—though I should think you know that I sold my picture and was sorry afterwards. I am *not* pleased to see it there, and I wish you—you hadn't persuaded me."

"What? Is this the—the gentleman?" Coleton assisted the impression he wished to convey by that artistic little pause before the use of the substantive.

"It is Mr. Boxrider, yes—Mr. Coleton." She made this most unhappily circumstanced introduction.

Coleton smiled. "Ah, yes, Miss Senior is the victim of the enterprise of your trade, or perhaps you call it—profession?"

"I don't," said Boxrider bluntly. He was direct enough, though his mind was searching—asking for explanations. This big, bland fellow, an affected ass for all his romantic air, with his assumption of proprietorship—and that girl submitting!

Coleton? The writer. He had tried to read his books, and really the fellow looked like them—handsome, yes, but not virile, strong.

"Mr. Boxrider bought my picture, Claude, quite fairly and I cannot now complain."

"Complain? Certainly not! Why should you complain, when you find yourself hung on the line on—what do they call it?—the poor man's picture gallery? Mr. Boxrider has surely performed a double service. He has enriched the mind of the million by presenting it with your picture and he has afforded you an opportunity of touching the

democracy. Mr. Boxrider, indeed, seems to be a highly beneficent person."

Boxrider had never heard anybody talk like that before. Some remoter curiosity within him was genuinely aroused to study the form of the speech. Without having the language of criticism he found in effect its irony feeble, the mind behind it shallow. It certainly was not an impressive form of address; and yet quite clearly it was meant to be.

These were remoter considerations though; the immediate idea in his mind was one which directly opposed itself first of all to the fact that the man should be here with Lesley at all, wearing that insufferable air of ownership. It is curious, by the way, how Coleton contrived in a few moments to increase the effectiveness of himself in the character of proprietor.

"We have now seen the finished work, and the National Gallery—I suppose, though, Mr. Boxrider, you would say, 'Why drag in the National Gallery?' And really if you said that, I think I should agree."

"Only, you see, Mr. Coleton," said Boxrider, smiling now, having in some sort found a policy—"you see I've not said anything of the kind. All I want is Miss Senior's opinion on the way we have turned out her picture." He kept turning an eye upon Lesley—turning, you might say, a determined eye on Lesley—an eye which demanded her interest, which seemed even, obscurely, to threaten her if she did not concede her interest.

Lesley flushed, glanced up once more and then half turned in his direction.

“I—I have no fault to find with the reproduction.”

“That is all I wanted to know,” said Boxrider now, suddenly and gravely. “Good evening, Miss Senior. Good evening, Mr. Coleton.”

He turned and strode off, leaving both those others suffering a feeling of being involved in an anti-climax. Coleton, accustomed to phrase things in his mind, jibbed from phrasing what he felt, nevertheless, had happened. The young man ought to have waited, left them to move off aloof and exalted above him and his vulgar commercial ploys. But it was *he* who had moved away. He had not been affected by the ironies thrown at him, and yet Coleton could not feel that his failure to be affected was due to his failure to understand. He had understood all right. In fact the young man had scored.

Coleton, the familiar little pucker in his forehead, turned to the girl.

“I can’t say that I’m much impressed by your friend.”

“I don’t think I understand what you mean, Claude. My friend?”

His face was quite dark though his lips still spoke gently.

Inwardly he may be suspected to have suffered some of those pangs which come to a man who finds himself suddenly in contact with a force deeper than his own. He had no reason to suppose that the girl recognized any inferiority in his self-projection—

the mere idea would have shocked him intolerably. If he did suffer by that conception of the young man it was as yet a mere haunting of the remoter corridors of his mind.

And all the time he was talking. They had moved off, each certainly aware of some failure in the quality of their movement, some essential loss of dignity.

“. . . Anyhow you won’t be involved in any more of these unpleasant episodes. It would be intolerable if you were. But there will be no more yielding to the blandishments of—of persons of this kind. I know there are people who hold me old-fashioned because I oppose this blatant age. . . .”

And so on with a kind of interminableness.

She listened, as it seemed to her, in a dream. How oddly confused everything looked. And surely something had been lost—had been carried away in the interval between their coming to that hoarding and their sorry leaving of it. (Yes, some active part of her intelligence got out that term “*sorry*”).

The man was silent to moroseness. If he turned to her to speak there was discoverable in the words a fretfulness. The word perhaps connotes a certain littleness of mental quality of which she was in no mood just now to suspect him. But for a detached observer that same word would seem appropriate enough.

Certainly, though, the magic was out of the ‘day.

CHAPTER XVIII

I

BOXRIDER possessed what in brief moments of self-contemplation he liked to call a "Business mind." After the encounter with Lesley and Coleton he called upon that mind to operate. He gave it orders with a certain sting in the word of command. And the thing still lay inactive—deliberately, even, as he said presently, vindictively, inactive. He wished to provide for a situation in which he saw himself in danger of being involved—provided for it by giving him in the first place a correct perspective. This business intelligence of his should be telling him that the whole matter was unimportant, that if he allowed himself to be troubled by minor distractions, small rebuffs to his personal consequence, he would ultimately stultify himself. Perhaps the poor thing did try to tell him; and certainly he gave it an indifferent attention. He wanted to let it direct his thinking as it had always done. Without being a psychologist he had some notions of mental processes, and he knew something of his own. He had always approved them—or when, in some minor detail, he had disapproved, he had sought to correct what was wrong. He had taken a not too subtle pride in his intellectual efficiency. He did not, he

told himself, make mistakes; and he did not do so because he kept his mind sufficiently under control. But he was now involved in a difficulty which he was best able to express when he had first called his mind an engine. If his mind was an engine there was implied to work it an engineer. He had not before entirely realized the elementary fact that, when he talked about his own control of his mind, he had forgotten to explain to himself who "he" was. His mind was evidently not himself. So that there was that engineer to be identified. And given that the engineer did exist—did one not transfer the credit of having volition to him? An engine had no volition—was merely something moved. The fact was that Boxrider was undergoing a process objectively familiar to all young men—the process of being in love. He was immensely perturbed—and immensely moved to happiness! He considered the influence of this overwhelming experience upon the success of his life, as he conceived success—yes, he had liberty enough, forced liberty enough to do that before it was too late; and if still immensely perturbed, yet still, too, he remained immensely moved to happiness.

But he was disturbed by other thoughts—particularly by a reminder of that meeting with Lesley and Coleton. He made no mistake about the relationship in which that pair stood. They were lovers. There was something in that man's attitude . . . and there was no missing the character of the girl's feeling.

Reciprocity? He supposed so—she giving back

to Coleton. For he had the eye to see Coleton *had* given. . . . And yet, as another man might have been, he was uneasy. For no reason that he could discover to be selfish, he was uneasy. What was it? Considering the matter detachedly, as he believed he was able to do, and trying to envisage a future for that girl—a future with happiness in it—he still was uneasy.

Boxrider, when his judgment was being brought to bear upon the relations between men and women, was not, perhaps, a man of the most acute perceptions. And yet his mind was trained to read and adjust itself to character. His success rested upon that alertness of his to the play of minds about him, as the success of all men who achieve anything rests upon their mental perceptions, their sense of the minds about them.

And now, considering Coleton with all possible bias in the man's favour, he was still uneasy. . . . A man that the world knew, yes; that men agreed to talk about, to admire. A man called by certain of his admirers "great" (wonderful word), and by many others "distinguished." Distinguished writer, that was it. Let the word go then—a man who filled a place in the world; who (face the facts, the possible facts, he admonished himself bravely), when he married, would give to his wife a name and a place and a consequence. A situation to desire for anyone in whom one's interest was really aroused.

'And yet. . . .

There was something . . . a softness, a certain femininity, or was it a suggestion of an experience engendered by contact with women? He could not yet satisfactorily characterize the thing.

Boxrider's active business mind—that cherished possession—had, oddly enough, much just now to exercise it. It was an adventurous mind—a mind which ran ahead and did so unfearfully. And just now it did not merely run ahead—it bounded forward; for dominating all his ideas was that new notion which had just come to him on the Embankment: the Courtenay picture. **THAT**, everywhere, on the walls!

Oh, yes, he knew what some people would say! He did not need to try to guess. That man—Coleton—yes, he saw Coleton's lips as he characterized the scheme. And others . . . Lesley.

And yet he was of the kind that does not change its mind for man or woman—even for a particular woman. Conceivably, being human, he was not sorry that he had already begun to work out a plan which should raise Coleton's opposition. Certainly, from Coleton, opposition was the only thing he could welcome.

But with regard to the girl his attitude was more obscure, perhaps more interesting. Influenced by Coleton she would certainly disapprove; and her disapproval might be turned into a dislike which was not hot—and therefore tamable—dislike, but a cold, contemptuous and probably enduring distaste: a

mere distaste which, acting upon her mind, made her at last find him merely an irrelevance. He was not prepared to endure that. And yet—

He never for a moment hesitated in that intent of his. Rather, he took on a new energy of endeavour. If, before, he had played with the scheme, he now resolved to work upon it, to press it. He widened the gulf between herself and him? Yes. And yet he had that native determination of his own; and if we examine him we may come to a rather odd conclusion—the conclusion, namely, that he welcomed every challenge, strengthened himself by each, as a strong man does with every struggle with each of the iron bars he rends to make his escape. And not only that he welcomed these challenges, but that, in some obscure part of his consciousness, there was already growing, not only the resolve that, out of them, victory should be won, but the notion that scarcely without them could victory be won. Conciliate her? No, he would defy her and her prejudices; let her lean to them . . . and win.

Youth? Familiar phenomenon of prancing egotism, easy confidence, vast o'ertopping assurance? Here is merely youth boastful and absurd? Conceivably. Yet was not it ever thus when the heart of the young man was stout enough? And the heart of this young man had stood up against the world from the beginning.

He was not going back; there was to be no withdrawal, no hesitation. And the better to show this to himself he (being now in the office) settled himself

at his desk and looked up at his partner. Beech must be told; he could not act without him. And Beech would make a fuss. He always did that.

“I say, Beech,” he began briskly. (The best way to deal with Beech was to be brisk—to bounce him.) “I say, I’ve got a new scheme.”

Beech groaned, looked up, antagonism visibly gathering in his eyes.

“Well?”

“Did you happen to read about that Courtenay picture on its way to America?”

“No—yes—confound it, Boxrider, what do *I* know, or *you* know, for that matter, about pictures? But I did see some filthy paragraph. The kind you do see in our abominable modern Press. These swine laying their defiling hands on such art treasures as are left to us; oh, yes, I saw *that*.”

“Well, I’ve been inquiring. It could be bought.”

“Bought? Of course it could be bought,” cried Beech fretfully. He was being played upon by vague, irritating suspicions.

“Yes, but I mean by anybody. By you—by me. . . .”

“Could it? And then we’d hang it up on that wall yonder, I suppose, just to satisfy the world of our financial as opposed to our intellectual solvency; or, I know”—his voice rising to that curious scream-pitch which characterized it when he was working up to one of those emotional crises—“I know, we’ll buy it and then use it to advertise Kingfords!”

“*Why not?*”

So softly had fallen the question in an atmosphere still vibrating with the shrillnesses of Beech's attack that for a moment the senior partner scarcely realized what had happened. For "happened" suits the circumstances perhaps better than "what had been said."

"Why not?" By that had Boxrider declared himself, delivered his plan, cast it into form, uttered it and made it current in the minds of men—that plan which had come to him as he had read a placard hanging behind a van on the Embankment.

II

Beech was on his feet, his eyes, as Boxrider had seen them before, dark with suddenly wrought passion.

"Why not? Why not? Did I hear you say why not? Because, Boxrider, if you did. . . . Besides"—he broke off with a sudden change, a characteristic habit, the habit of a mind naturally vehement but inconsequent. (Beech reminded his junior sometimes of a terrier seeking his master and diverted by a second scent)—"besides, the thing's preposterous. You were just talking about its price, and its price is prohibitive! A good thing too—since it saves me from wasting further breath on an utterly absurd and, I'm bound to say, Boxrider, rather disgusting scheme—I beg your pardon," with characteristically uneasy irony, "I suppose I must use your lingo—proposition."

“Disgusting!” repeated Boxrider coolly. “Whom does it disgust? It disgusts you. And you were bound to be disgusted in any case.” This quite smilingly. “You always are, you know! As to its absurdity, I dissent. The thing can be done. The price of the picture isn’t as prohibitive as all that. It’s not the ‘Blue Boy.’ I’ve made inquiries and it can be bought for ten thou.”

Beech nodded quickly in excited satisfaction. “Exactly, and it might as well be ten million.”

“Oh, no!” said Boxrider coolly. “Oh, no! In fact, I’ve found the buyer.”

“You have! And who is the fool—or the vulgarian—I really,” throwing out his hands in mock despair, “I really don’t know what to call him!”

“The fool—and vulgarian is the gentleman most interested, Beech. You, yourself, you will remember, suggested a few minutes ago that we might use the picture for Kingford, and—well—Kingford is the man who’s going to buy!”

Beech darted across the room, turned and came back, his head held down, but in such a way that his line of vision was nevertheless directly over Boxrider’s head.

“I suppose you’re speaking the truth—you’re not merely anticipating your persuasion of our—our client?” (It was odd how Beech found himself forced to be respectful in his references to the one valuable connexion which he had been able to maintain from his father’s day.)

“Certainly I am speaking the truth.” For the

first time Boxrider spoke sharply. "Being a sensible being Kingford saw my point at once. That picture is an immortal thing. Very well. Put it on the wall and hand it down to posterity. You're giving the poor man at last a supremely great picture in a way that you can never give him a picture in the National Gallery. Poor men are busy men. They've no time to go to picture galleries—even free ones. And busy men don't spend their Saturday afternoons coming into town to see pictures. But put pictures where they *must* see them every day and you're bringing great art into their lives. You say that isn't the motive. I say that it's a very big part of the motive. I'm out to change the hoardings, and here's our finest chance. Kingford sees it. Kingford can afford the picture and will be able, if he wants to, to put it on his own walls or do, what I'm urging him to do, present it to a public gallery, while every hoarding and——"

"And nothing will convince me!" burst in Beech. "It's a hideous thing—a scandal, I'm surprised at Kingford; no, I'm not, because he seems to let you influence him. You've driven him as you drove—that girl."

"What?"

But Beech, without further word, seizing his hat, had walked quickly from the room.

CHAPTER XIX

I

A GREAT battle was now joined. For that plan of Boxrider's was carried through with an immense zest. The thing became known, and becoming known caused enormous and extraordinary reactions in many minds. Boxrider was fully resolved; and the whole of his power to advertise other people was now put unreservedly at his own service! If he could make the "propositions" of others known to a world which would willingly enough have directed its attention elsewhere, he was engaged now to provide his own "proposition" with "publicity." He did not choose to disguise the scheme: he thrust it upon the notice of a shrinking world willing to be interested but not sure that disapproval must not ultimately be the proper gesture. And within the range of his policy he deliberately included this aggressive projection, upon the public imagination, of his scheme to bend even the genius of a Courtenay to the purpose of his mind.

The thing was paragraphed on the very day that the picture was bought. "Famous Courtenay to stay," ran a super-headline. "To Hang not on Walls of National Gallery but on the Hoardings." There were other statements of the same fact. And the

information followed that Kingford had bought the picture and meant to present it to the nation—via the walls of London.

Immediately there was much looking of the gift horse in the mouth. On the very day following the announcement of the sale, the chief protagonist of the “Protest against Public Advertising” delivered his opinion in the columns of the world’s “classic” daily sheet. The paper found the matter of such general interest and the principle involved so intriguing that it dealt with the letter in its leader columns. And the name of Claude Coleton was thrust upon the attention of a world sections of which had before remained ignorant of a character so honourably distinguished. The eye of Boxrider, as he opened the paper, leapt to that letter like hound to hare. There was something for him to do at once—reply. That man would see the reply, and if he saw it the girl, too, should be conscious of its vigorous gesture; for vigorous gesture it should have. It was bound to have that coming from such a mind occupied by such a purpose. And so there at his desk sat Boxrider writing. Presently, he reflected, he would go round and talk over the letter with Kingford: but first he would write the reply, and his hurrying hand moved over the sheet. There was some things to be said—things he wanted to say even if they were not strictly relevant to the present facts.

He was sufficiently occupied to be scarcely aware when Beech came in and sat down opposite. An “Ah, Beech!” was about the only recognition Box-

rider made of the entry. He wrote on, and writing he was ignorant of the surveillance of that man opposite. Beech had lifted a pen, but it lay now in a hand which rested idly on the desk; and he sat there watching, speculating, guessing—indeed assuring himself of a good deal.

Boxrider knew nothing of all that. But he knew nothing of that quite other fact in a remarkable situation: that another hand had earlier in the day written a letter upon just that theme which occupied his hand now—a letter, too, directed just as this present letter would by and by be directed.

In the meantime he envisaged himself at last, deliberately, as the protagonist of a great and original movement which should give a new 'dignity to commerce and a new purpose to art. Why not? The more he considered, the more confident did he become, and the more did his mind concentrate upon a purpose in relation to which originally he may conceivably have wanted conviction. The opportunity which Coleton now gave him was one that he welcomed. He would publish not only an opinion but a proclamation: he would announce a new thing.

“What,” he demanded, “makes men holding Mr. Coleton’s views raise these objections? They think they are defending great art from vandalism. But on what is their defence grounded? What is the principle? Is there, as a matter of fact, a principle at all? Is not what moves them really merely a prejudice? Because a thing has never been done before, therefore, say these people, it is never to be done. I

invite them to consider this syllogism—as I believe they like to call it. I defy them to point out a flaw in it. It is a good thing for a man to see great pictures. Advertising gives better opportunities for showing men great pictures than any other means. Therefore, great pictures ought to be used in advertising. There is plenty of bad advertising art. Say that, and I agree. But having attacked bad advertising art, why, when a man tries to provide good advertising art—why, I say, attack him? The real truth is that my critics cannot think with independence of judgment. They do not say this thing is bad on its merits—they say it is bad because it has never been done before. Once upon a time these same people, or their ancestors, were made ill at the mere thought of a woman earning her own living. They could not argue, and their real objection was to the fact that what was involved was a change. The same people objected to railways because, they said, men wanted to move too fast. Their real objection was to the fact that what was involved was a change.

“I am wrong only if it is bad for a man to see beautiful pictures. I am not wrong because I want to do something which involves a change.”

He signed his letter and added a postscript:

“By the way, does Mr. Coleton object to his publisher advertising his new book?”

II

That letter raised a noise louder than any which

had been made before. The name of Boxrider began, indeed, to be a sign for Vandal. You could get a laugh at any pseudo-art club if you brought in his name. "Walking along the Embankment, ladies and gentlemen, I was suddenly requested by an electrically lighted communication from the Surrey side of the river to try a cup before bedtime. I dare say that there are some of you who are so old-fashioned as to wish to be spared these illuminated and, shall I call them, illuminating reminders—some of you who are not Boxriders——"

There would be a laugh then. And the "lighter vein" providers in the newspapers found their chance also. With a little ingenuity or industry, or both, they could extract some kind of a pun from the mere name. And there were other courses to which resort could be had: other tit-bits of opportunity; the professional humourist does not abandon the bone till all the meat is off it.

The total result was that a young man who had set out to advertise others was getting the advertisement of his life.

He fully realized it, and he did not complain. It was good for Beech & Boxrider, and certainly from the point of view of business it was good. The boldness of this young man, his certainty, his resoluteness, attracted to him what he called, and liked to call, the big men—the people with the commodities which were of the "household word" order—"Peppo Mustard," "Leafman's Tea," "Anti-Smut Soap."

One partner rejoiced. The other? It seemed to

Boxrider that Beech was more and more given to those shrill passionate complaints of his. There had been one curious incident, for instance, on the morning when Boxrider's reply to Coleton had appeared. The junior partner had turned down the page and flung it across to Beech.

"That's my answer to Coleton—and, if you don't mind my saying it—to you."

Beech had looked up quickly, brought an eye upon the paper for a moment, and then, with a finger on another letter in smaller type published with others in furtherance of the discussion on the propriety of using great Art for Advertising, he pushed the sheet back.

"That's my answer. I mean," he corrected quickly, "that embodies what would be my answer if I had to reply—to you!"

Boxrider glanced at the letter. It was, he saw, signed "Disgusted." Then he looked across with a smile.

"You'd seen the paper already this morning?"

"I?" cried Beech.

"Well, you know you hadn't time to read 'Disgusted's' letter. And yet you say it embodies your views. I suppose the mere word *Disgust*—"

"Yes," Beech acknowledged with a strange eagerness to fit a cap. "Yes, that was it. The word did express my feelings so perfectly that I assumed the letter embodied my opinions."

The matter had dropped, Boxrider remembered. But later in the day he was curious to observe Beech

cutting something out of a copy of the great daily in which a nation's anxieties are always so liberally dealt with.

So far that was only an incident. There was no doubt that Beech was profoundly stirred; he contrived continual protests, offered threats, and only stopped his bitter plaints when, the climax of his aroused passion being reached, he ran furious from the room.

These scenes were now of daily occurrence, and their character may have seemed, to a casual eye, to have had very little variety. To Boxrider they appeared to have some developing quality; he could not properly describe it but it was there; it was as if the mind of Beech passed from one minor explosion to the next along a powder trail which must at last reach the magazine itself.

With one curious mood which he had noticed in Beech—a mood which had had the effect of giving him an obscure sense of disturbance and that was characterized by a curious coldness and determination in contrast to the more usual excitements—Boxrider continued at intervals to find himself in contact. In such moments he was again impressed by some persistent intent in his partner, “For all the world,” as he had said to himself once, “as if Beech were working a side line on the Q. T.” But at last he began definitely to believe that this mood was obscurely related to those other very different manifestations—those quick furies. . . . He still did not know how to put it. But it seemed to him

that in Beech there was something—malignant. Whether he held himself or flung away restraints—always that malignancy. Something abnormal that pointed—yes, definitely—to a final mental catastrophe. And in the meantime these scenes . . . absurd scenes. . . .

An occasion which Boxrider remembers was once when, looking across at Beech and pushing back his chair as if to give emphasis to a special occasion he had begun, "Silk & Rafena are giving up the big ground floor office in A."

"Well?" said Beech sharply.

"Well, I've been thinking we could move there."

"What on earth for?" cried Beech, his whole attitude immediately inimical, as always, to any scheme of his partner.

"Because it's business. We're growing—you may not realize it, but we're growing."

"Realize it? Growing? Yes. I do realize we're growing, Boxrider; but growing at what an expense? —at the expense of any rag of reputation for decent feeling we may ever have had, at the expense of any—"

"Oh, that weary stuff, Beech! Must it *always* go on?"

"Yes." Beech's face twitched; his eyes were shining, too, with an odd brightness which Boxrider had noticed there sometimes of late. "Yes, it must go on as long as I have enough spirit to protest. I mayn't have it always. I—I—think sometimes I'll come to the end of something some day. But I will—

I *will* protest as long as I can. Our name is a by-word wherever decent people are, and if I had any influence with Kingford—if you hadn't filched the influence I once had—I'd—”

“Steady, my friend. Your influence—be fair—wasn't much—ever.” He spoke quietly, with a certain tolerance, even a kindness. “Kingford was on the point of leaving us. Well, I've kept Kingford. I've trebled our profits from that source alone. I don't know that I haven't multiplied them five times—and I've brought you a lot more from other sources. In a year or two, if you choose, you can retire—I'll buy you out. You'll be free to live the kind of life you like. But we want bigger offices and we've now the chance of getting them without leaving the building.”

“I suppose you've engaged them?”

“Not without consulting you. I've been over them—yes. I've arranged what the landlord is to do for us in the way of decoration and when we are to get possession, but I didn't sign the lease till I'd seen you.”

“Then I'm against. Yes, I hate the whole thing. I—”

“You realize, do you—that we shall be turning back business, and that if we turn back business your escape is going to be delayed?”

Beech sprang up, the familiar sign.

“Have your own way then; have your own way! You always do in any case. Your offer to consult me is merely a profession. It never was anything

else.’’ He walked to the door hurriedly; then, with a trembling hand, grasped the latch and went out, pulling the door behind him noisily.

Boxrider sighed, took up the lease, spread it out, rang a bell, and when the clerk appeared, ‘‘I’m going to sign a document,’’ he said. ‘‘I want you to witness the signature.’’

And that is how, incidentally, Higgs, the liftman, was able to announce that ‘‘ ‘E’s comin’ back to me ’ere. Never saw no good in D. And ‘e’s comin’ in on the ground floor this time. Beech? Oh yes. Beech ’as got to come in with ‘im. They all ’es to do that if ‘e sez so.’’

III

As for Lesley she early heard echoes of the battle.

‘‘That fellow you sold your picture to . . . that was bad enough of course.’’ She had got to expect the note of reproof, whenever Coleton had occasion to refer to her work. She even suspected him of contriving that reproof. ‘‘But if it was bad, what he now proposes is infinitely worse. It really passes my comprehension, Lesley, how you ever suffered to approach you a—a person capable of artistic outrages of that sort.’’

It seemed to her of late, indeed, that Coleton had begun to adopt an attitude which seemed not merely to involve reproof but something definitely reformatory. It was a skilfully enough disguised intent, but there certainly began to seem to her to be a pur-

pose at the back of much of his lightly spun talk. She even felt herself, on occasion, made the protagonist of the whole philosophy and practice of this fearful thing called "Publicity." And at first she was not prepared to protest. She whispered *peccavi*, she bowed her head. Remember this girl was in love—or thought she was in love. She was lifted up. The man had exalted her. She was humble when she thought of what he had done. Not merely did she discover in him the attributes presumably distinguishable in one who helped to direct the thought of his time, whose influence went to protect the idea of art and beauty, who was acknowledged a defender of fine traditions; but also she found that he must possess some special right to shape her mind, direct her thoughts.

A mood? Possibly. And not a mood without parallel in the minds of other young women situated as she was!

The effect of this manner and attitude of his was calculated to preserve the continuance of the mood. He had asked for her; but having asked her, he asked no more. If he gave—and he certainly may be held to have given—he made no show of giving now. He merely accepted. If this was a policy it was certainly a policy calculated to keep the lady offering all the time; it almost made her the suitor. It kept her sensibility active and trembling; it maintained the flow of current through the channels of her being. She now had never the leisure necessary to detach herself and look about her. She was like

a woman earning a wretched living by working long hours, who has not time to go in quest of a stand-point and a philosophy.

Of one thing she was very sure: she hated the mention on Claude's lips, not only of the picture but of the man who had made her sell it. In Coleton's company, indeed, Boxrider had come to seem to her of the type normally characterized by herself and Netta as "a creature." They called men creatures whom they agreed were for some reason or other excluded from their own social comity. And she made no attempt to defend Boxrider.

"I see he's been in 'The Times,'" murmured Claude, lingering over tea opposite Netta and with Lesley at his side. "He has been trying to defend himself. And of course," with an odd, rather unctuous, profession of mildness, "I dare say the objections which I and others have raised are imperceptible to him—necessarily so."

"Poor blind Mr. Boxrider," said Netta. "Couldn't you get up a class for the education of him and his kind?"

Coleton flushed slightly. He glared, while his nose twitched in a way it had when he was piqued. He did not like to be chaffed, and Netta's little malicious ironies were always out of place; he wished she could see it. A glance at Lesley, however, assured him that she was not in sympathy. So with a wave of the hand he made to dismiss the lightly offered words. (After all, poor Netta! Perhaps he had not treated Netta too well. He ought to have

shown her earlier how groundless were any hopes she had.)

“I am really rather sorry for some of these people,” he declared. “There they go right through life defying every canon of Art or right feeling. And when they reach middle age and have made what, I believe, they call their ‘pile,’ they look about them with ingenuous smiles and expect people of taste to form friendships with them.”

“Then when Mr. Boxrider has made his pile,” said Netta, “he will merely be wasting good paper by writing to Mr. Claude Coleton and asking him to luncheon.”

“I’m sure,” put in Lesley, who felt that the atmosphere was growing uneasy, “that Mr. Boxrider will have enough friends of his own without troubling *us*.”

This “*us*” was a reminder to Netta. After all, he is going to marry *me*. I’m perfectly aware that you think he ought to be going to marry you. “*Us*”—to remind her friend that it was she, Lesley, whose fate was involved with Claude’s. Look forward—see us together. It may hurt, but you have asked for the pain, have you not? See us in a close spiritual conjunction from which you must necessarily be excluded. Only brief is *your* authority to pour out tea for him!

Netta smiled—smiled easily. But Netta perfectly understood. And Lesley’s manœuvre had been entirely successful, for the elder woman had no more “chaff” for Claude.

As for Claude, he may be supposed to have understood every detail of that minor duel. Women's minds—was not it his business to read them?

He was grateful enough to Lesley to withhold the note of criticism from his voice; he approved her turning of Netta's attack—approved not only the fact of it, but the mere manner of it. (It was well for Netta Graeme to remember that *she* was not the selected woman.) And, he so approving, his voice grew quick and tender, he bent over her whispering, he became so definitely the lover that Netta presently found excuse to slip away. Alone, in the hall, her face grew pale, her lip trembled, and she passed to her room as if in haste to hide herself.

... Claude drew close to Lesley.

“Poor Netta. . . . Women of her kind are so——” He paused, smiling. The girl looked up, made curious.

“I suppose, Claude . . . you've known——”

“I've known one or two. . . . We have had talks. It is possible to guess.” He shrugged a shoulder. “But it is of *this* little woman that I'm thinking. . . .”

Lesley sat up suddenly. “Of me? Well, let us be very prosaic. I'm going to arrange my programme for next year.”

The little pucker reappeared in Claude's forehead.

“Programme? What can you be thinking of to talk of a programme? You don't want a programme. *I* am your programme.”

“No, Claude. I'm a wage-earner. I've got to

live. And I've got to live on what I earn till—till—”

“Till all responsibilities pass into my happy hands,” he put in rather awkwardly. That was what she had meant certainly, though she could not say, “Well, yes.”

He waved his hands. “Then I suppose I've no right to interfere—yet.” (A change of note: and yet a change to be anticipated—feared. . . . There was that thing she had heard . . . that word . . . Philanderer. One who played, who asked for no responsibilities, who liked to fondle and to pass on.) She did not know; she—wished she did. She had dreaded his forbiddings. She thought she wanted them now. They ought to have been heard now. What had he to wait for? He was a well-to-do man. . . . He wanted to be “her programme.” But what else? . . . Was it possible that Netta could be—right?

It was that which wounded most deeply—to think that her moment of triumph over Netta was illusory! Netta might already have read the situation and be secretly smiling. Lesley flushed up suddenly with shame and anger.

Later it was to be her remembrance of her emotions at this time, and particularly her recollection that she had been chiefly disturbed by the thought of Netta's triumph, which produced in her mind many remarkable revaluations.

At the moment she was occupied by the fact of his submission—of his sudden submission. And

certainly her primary emotion was chagrin. He had not struggled against her, not even pleaded. She had her living to earn. Very well, said he in effect, earn it—not “let *me* earn it for you.”

They made tepid speeches now; both seemed as if they tried to survive an anticlimax. His talk became as flat as it could become; hers grew astonishingly—what could be called—business-like.

“I shall have two pictures for the R. A.,” she said, “and Johnson—my pet dealer, you know—has commissioned me to do him three. And a man I know has given me some magazine covers to do, and then”—with a quickness and a smile that he could not quite comprehend—“and then if I get very hard up, there are always these advertising people.”

“No,” he broke in, “no. I will *not* have that!” He had refused to take it lightly—to respond to her smile. “I can’t permit——”

“Permit?” she put in, arching an eyebrow.

He responded confusedly: “Yes—permit.” But his authority was unsteady again at once. This girl fell behind other women, he found, in this, that she sought to impose conditions. He liked them to give all—unconditionally; and they did generally, bless them! She, on the other hand, could only think in terms of “If you want to control my life you must give me—a home. Until then I preserve my independence.”

So that once again the talk fell to commonplace levels; and neither was sorry when presently, her

eyes lighted by a happy smile, Netta Graeme came back into the room.

Coleton coming back a day or two later came with a new policy. The fact is he had tried, poor man, to do without and found that he could not do without. This woman, even if—perhaps because—she did not conform to what he considered to be the order for women, was destructive of content. He had to come back. He was—he announced to himself with an odd egotistic excitement—really in love.

To one of his temperament the experience was full of amazement, thrills. To have written himself off, deliberately, as incapable of that emotion, and to discover it a motive in his being, astonished and almost delighted him, if it made him a little fearful. He must see this witch again—have access to her, talk to her. Even, if it must be, bend himself to her. . . . Only, as to that, he would consider still a little further.

But in the meantime the pair were lovers again. There were more excursions—many letters when, as happened presently, he ran off for a country-house visit. Netta used to see the coming of these letters. The writing was not unfamiliar. *She* could match it from letters in her own possession. . . . Perhaps she suspected that she could match the sentiments expressed within.

For her the days were now a dull, aching monotony, varied only by some little barb of quick pain as

she saw the letters arrive; or, when Claude being back again, she watched from behind curtains the pair setting off down the street. She had made no mistake; there was something in Claude's eyes that had never been there when *she* had known him. She perfectly understood what he would try to do now—how he would make determined efforts to control himself. But there would be that element of determination there, and the very fact that it was there and that it was necessary, only went to prove that there was something which did not easily yield. Claude was getting out of self-control. And she knew him well enough to know that, in such a crisis, he would not show persistence. He did not want the domesticities. But he would take them now—would yield.

That girl had got him; and with that conviction now firmly established, and with earlier hopes of her own survival dead, Netta found herself encased in darkness. She could see no glimmer, no hope, no rest.

Some trite philosopher of the people has given the consolation that following a darkest hour comes the dawn. She wondered whether she had reached an ultimate on that occasion when she had set forth with Lesley on a certain shopping toil.

“Shopping” it was called; actually, there had come a letter from Scotland in that well-known hand bidding Lesley see an occasional table for sale at a Strand dealer's. “If you like it as much as I do ask the man to put it aside for me.”

Crumbling. That was how Netta read the facts. The man, yes, was crumbling. Here was sign of it. He did not talk of marriage yet, but he talked of tables. He made his absence the excuse to send Lesley to look at a table which he could have ordered by post if he had wanted it. In any case, he could have had the business of it held over till his return. The suggestion offered to Lesley was, of course, that he—prepared.

They loitered, shopping, and then had themselves conveyed by bus Strandwards. Netta used to wonder afterwards how their feet were directed to the bus roof. She was not aware of any particular impulse thither—they generally travelled inside. Suppose, though, they had not made that ascent? Her philosophy of life seemed again to be challenged.

The dealer's shop was near to the City boundary, so that they were approaching Clements Danes when they stood up to leave the bus. And it was now that there occurred that profoundly important moment which was mysteriously to govern so much that was to come after. The pair had looked down. Upon what? Upon what but that great hoarding standing up there veiling the slow uprising of the office of the Australian Commonwealth? And hanging upon that hoarding, in that great phantasmagoria of colour, were many pictures, many legends, many appeals. Yet from these pictures one drew itself out with the dignity and splendour of royalty among commoners. From the midst of that massed talent the one thing of genius shone like the sun

among the stars. It was Netta who spoke, rather casually, “‘The Woman in the Red Gown!’ Courtenay’s picture! To see it *there!* But—that will be the work of that dreadful young man——”

“Dreadful?” The word—the question as it had seemed—had come from the lips of Lesley.

Netta looked at her with sudden curiosity. The girl was pale and plainly excited by some sudden emotion. But of course . . . she must dislike this man; had not he embarrassed her, led her into an action which had created difficulties for her with her lover?

And yet . . . was there not something about her repetition of the word dreadful? . . . What was it? Was it merely a question? Netta found that inquiry occupying her mind to the exclusion of everything, though she went on speaking as they descended the bus and walked with eyes turning hoardingwards towards the curio dealer’s. “They said he would do it. I mean he said he would. And now he has done it! Poor Claude, how distressed he will be in all his beautiful feelings, won’t he?”

“Please leave Claude alone,” said Lesley suddenly, and, as it seemed to her hearer, a little stridently.

“I’m sorry, dear. I *will* leave him alone. But really you know if I hadn’t heard Claude say what an extremely wicked outrage it was on the decencies of art—high art—I’d be inclined to think that Mr. Boxrider had almost justified himself. I—even I—can almost feel that there is beauty in these streets

when I look at that wall. And we needn't look at the name Kingfords if we don't wish to."

The inquisitive Netta, talking all the time, was watching shrewdly; and immediately now she had something to add to her data—if that was to be the word: something valuable . . . an extraordinary thing . . . gratitude. She was sure of it. Gratitude. Then to go back, as she found herself going back to that moment on the bus-top, when Lesley had repeated that word—that word of Netta's "dreadful." How to characterize the repetition? But she knew how she was inclined to characterize it . . . a challenge. . . . Yes, Lesley had challenged the word . . . in a sense protested against it.

And it was now that that extraordinary idea took possession of Netta. It took such possession that it did not loose its hold even while Lesley inspected the table, discussed Claude's attitude towards it.

On the way home, and later when they sat over their tea, the idea still filled the mind of the elder woman; and Lesley discovered in her friend a lightness and brightness which seemed to be curious and certainly spontaneous. And, after all, if you have in you a reborn spirit of adventure, a sudden reblossoming, you will conceivably be discovered with bright eyes and a glow in action.

CHAPTER XX

I

THAT idea of Netta's grew the more she considered it. Perhaps it was governed by her will to believe. Certainly at last it filled her horizons, charging them with light and hope. For if *that* was possible, if that detachment of the girl could be accomplished, who knew? Claude was in love; and a man in love is not susceptible to influences, however inimical to his hopes. That could be true of many men. But she thought she knew Claude; certainly she sought to assure herself that she knew him. Claude fed on adoration: was it not possible that he drew sustenance for any adoration he bestowed from the adoration he received? Certainly the case of most women in relation to him was paralleled by that of the girls who took out soldiers and paid expenses. They got back no more than they put out. If only she could be certain that that was true of Lesley in relation to Claude! Well, she would compel her own certainty.

When she considered the other side of the case she felt, all the same, on surer ground. She was almost sure . . . and yet there were moments when she was not sure at all.

II

There were conversations to remember; *this*, for instance: They had been opening their papers at breakfast time and in Netta's "Daily Picture" had been something that made her exclaim.

"Lesley Senior," she read out, mock-sententious.

Lesley looked up, catching the accent appropriate to quotation.

"What do you mean?"

"Merely that I see your name."

"What have I been doing now?"

"Oh, only this!" She tossed across the sheet in which Lesley's Kingfords picture appeared.

"Oh, *that!*" with a grimace. "You needn't have reminded me of—of—"

"Of that dreadful incident—that more dreadful young man."

"Exactly," said the girl calmly. "You know how I feel."

"I can only guess, my dear," said Netta mysteriously.

Lesley turned her questioning eye upon her friend.

"I wonder what you mean by that?" she said.

"Very much what I say," answered Netta. "I'm sure that I think this man, this Mr. Boxrider, is impossible, as the rest of us do. And of course with Claude so often to suggest contrasts you must naturally feel the more strongly—always, of course, assuming that the vision which Claude supplies hasn't

driven out all others—so that Man, for you, is now comprehended in the one word Claude. But——”

“Don’t be too absurd, Netta! A mild ridiculousness I can take from you, but there are really limits——”

“Are there? But don’t interrupt, dear. I was going to say that even if Claude, like a great sun, has made all other men pale, ineffectual planets—and I’m sure that is the case—I’m quite sorry for poor Mr. Boxrider.”

“Sorry?” startled out of herself. “Why on earth should you be *sorry?*”

“Because, my child—but evidently it is the privilege of youth and beauty to gather riches without knowing it, to find pockets full without a notion of the filling. Seemingly you don’t know—*really* don’t know.”

“Know?”

“Why that the poor absurd creature is really quite affected by you.”

“How absurd you are—rather offensively so now, if you don’t mind my saying so.”

“I don’t mind in the least. I was merely stating what was evident to the senses of anyone. But I dare say you’d rather not hear.”

“Certainly I would rather not hear. . . . Though I don’t understand what you mean. . . . Evident to the senses.”

“Why,” cried Netta, refraining from comment on the contradiction in the terms of Lesley’s reply (that curiosity was inconsistent with a following re-

fusal to hear)—“why, it was perfectly evident. The creature came here——”

“Is it necessary to call a man a creature simply because we agree to—to—not to approve of him?”

“By no means. Indeed, I should wonder if *anything* is really necessary. Well, then, the man. He came here ostensibly about a picture.”

“*Actually*, surely, about a picture.”

“I stick to my word. Ostensibly. And quite plainly—it was plain to me—it wasn’t the picture but the artist that interested him.”

“How ridiculous you are!” cried Lesley, rising from the table. She spoke calmly. There was no added colour in her cheeks; and to the extent of the absence of something expected, Netta Graeme was disappointed.

As for Lesley, that young woman was certainly undergoing immense emotional reactions. Claude. Yes, she had held to the image of Claude and discovered in it what, precisely?

And now she racked her mind to find some early whisper, some foreshadowing. *Had* she felt that thing and promptly suppressed it? By what was she now haunted?

There were dates to which she looked not less than Netta looked. Netta’s date was hers. But there was another certainty. If we but knew what we do when we disturb an image of ourselves!

CHAPTER XXI

I

A FIGURE beginning at last to take its place in these adventures of certain souls is that of Beech. Always now he was conscious of disturbances ; he found that minor things—the slamming of a door, the whistling of those clerks outside—which had always troubled him, had now power to carry him off into conditions of mind when, as he supposed, he could not be normal. Sooner or later, as he told himself, a crash would come. He would examine himself in the glass at home in the morning with an eager half-frightened curiosity, looking for “signs.”

He thought he knew what to look for, believed that he understood the significance of the unsteady muscle, the new leanness about the temples, the startled eye. People talked about nervous breakdown. It would not, when it came, be merely a breakdown.

Looking for causes (not that he needed to look—they were set out obviously before him, as he told himself), his mind came back always to Boxrider. Every misery in his life had sprung from Boxrider. It was Boxrider who had contrived those contemptuous challenges to his opinions ; those outrages upon his own conceptions of decency in art, in manners,

and in life itself; those subtle, personal humiliations which had made mere existence almost an agony. The clerks, taught to create a contrast between their attitude towards one master and the other; the contemptuous challenge to his feelings declared by the whole policy of the firm of which he had the misfortune to be a member—thoughts of these afflicted him until he wondered with a kind of detached curiosity for how much longer he could endure. In moments of extreme mental tension that kind of detachment is not uncommon. The poor victim watches the coming of final misfortune as the wretch at the stake notes, with a kind of naked curiosity, the approach of the first tongue of flame which shall destroy him.

But Beech, inaccurate student of his own psychology, knew this, that Boxrider's offence was not his use of the clerks for his partner's humiliation (in some very obscure part of his being Beech knew that that charge could not be maintained, though he refused to admit as much). Nor was it the policy which had found its climax in the use of the Courtenay picture. The real offence was bound up with something else. He knew very well with what; he had merely to catch mental visions of the face of that girl. . . .

Yes, at the last he had hated Boxrider because Boxrider had seemed to exercise an influence (he could not call it more; he was thankful that, strain as he could, he could not call it more). But he had been hideously aware of his partner as one who was

everything that commanded success. And he had had a strange, deep fear that here in this matter of Lesley Senior, as in other matters, Boxrider must inevitably succeed. Then he had heard of the appearance of Claude Coleton, and if Boxrider's calm exterior confessed nothing, Beech yet had a subtle satisfaction in guessing his partner's feelings.

Nevertheless, his mind continued to be haunted. Boxrider, he told himself, was so certain in his aim, and Boxrider had unquestionably intended . . . and yet. . . . He was back with an idea which had occupied him before. Did it matter? What was it he wanted himself? He who had been starved of women and all that women could mean, who had now looked upon a woman whose merest movement had the significance of the eternal to him—where was he now? He wanted her, his heart cried for her, he was sick with hungering for the touch of that hand of hers . . . and yet? How often he halted, hesitated, preparing himself to answer that challenge hovering near. This girl for himself! Yes, but if not for himself then for none. Again a pause in his thinking, and then, finally, the admission—that other before Boxrider, that other before Boxrider.

He could not further characterize his impulses. . . . They said—the people who talked at large—that love went with hate. Hate—hate suggested pure melodrama. Was he becoming melodramatic?

He began to be afraid again. All his ideas went in cycles; and here he was involved once more in the cycle of fear—fear of the tremendous accuracy of

Boxrider's aim. Why need he be uneasy? There was going to be—a marriage. . . . He let the thought come . . . "Mrs. Coleton." Well, *he* had never had a hope, and "Mrs. Coleton" might do as well as anything else. He had informed himself that he did not know much about Coleton apart from. . . .

But now he felt he knew something. He grew uneasy with a new uneasiness, and stood ruminative for several minutes before he started off to walk again.

And it was now that there came to him a new and sufficiently astonishing impulse—the impulse of a man who had ceased to be normal.

It was now that Beech, breaking into the street, set out on that remarkable impulse for Chelsea. He would see her again. He wanted to tell himself that he had seen her before she married and went out of reach. But what he confessed at last was that he wanted to see she was still safe—from Boxrider. And if to anyone familiar with the actual circumstances of recent events in Lesley's circle, this idea—this fear—of Beech's must seem unintelligible, that is no reason for failure to envisage the mind of this man.

And so we find him on the way to the flat.

II

He stood looking at Netta—looking, as she said afterwards, "wildly, and yet stupidly, as if he could not quite think how he came to be there"—as if he

had come to the door expecting only one face to meet him and was now reacting to a shock.

All the same Netta was calm.

“Won’t you come in,” she said sweetly, “Mr. Boxrider?”

“No!” he protested with swift, shrill emphasis. “Beech, Beech, that’s my name.”

“Oh, yes, Mr. Beech! I must,” with a little gentle malice, “have been thinking of the firm. You are Mr. Boxrider’s partner.”

“Yes, yes, worse— Yes. I’m his partner. I called—in fact—”

“But do come in.” She had been finding life rather flat. Lesley was out with Claude—another table, or was it a chair? This funny wild animal promised a little relief. Of course he wanted Lesley—they all seemed to do. She smiled at that thought without any tenderness. But she did not say that Miss Senior was out. She wanted amusement, and this man seemed to offer promise of it. She had seen Beech before and had guessed something. Yes, certainly he might be amusing. Moreover, there was that new idea of hers regarding Lesley. This Beech might be made to contribute something to the development of that idea.

And so she led him in and brought him to the room where before he had spoken to the girl. Netta noted with sudden satisfaction Lesley’s photograph on the table opposite the chair in which she had planted Beech. His start and eager craning forward were both satisfying to her hungry malice.

"I'm very sorry Miss Senior is out. I suppose you came to commission another picture."

"Picture! Commission a picture! Most certainly I did *not* come to commission a picture. I assure you, Mrs. Graeme, I hate the whole thing."

("I really thought the creature's eyes would roll right out of his head in his funny excitement. He kept trying to stand up and then decided to stick to his seat. And his fingers were opening and closing and he was breathing hard and in a way that quite frightened me.")

She was watching him carefully, smilingly.

"I wonder why you came then," very gently.

"I came—I came to—to call. I understood that she—that Miss Senior would shortly be removing herself from the need to sell her art to—to *our* sort." This with a self-immolating contempt. "And I thought I'd like to tell her that I personally disclaim any responsibility for what, I'm sure, was a wretched humiliation for her—especially as our house happens to be responsible for the latest outrageous—I mean the scheme which is being discussed—and disapproved of just now."

"I see." Netta was moving very slowly. "Yes, I suppose she will be removing herself as you put it; and yet—" boldness was coming now and she looked up—"and yet I sometimes wonder—"

"Wonder? *What* do you wonder?"

"I sometimes wonder whether she wouldn't like to go on painting pictures for—for you."

"For me?" Just for a moment he fell into the

trap; his eyes glowed with sudden emotion and there was a flush on his cheeks. ("I quite hated killing his one poor little hope.")

"I mean, of course, Mr. Beech, for you collectively. For your firm—perhaps really"—this very slowly, almost idly—"for your partner—if one must separate you into component parts."

There was fire in his eyes again now. "That's absurd. She never had the slightest use for Box-rider."

"Are you quite sure?" said the gentle Netta.

"Sure? Of course I'm sure, Mrs. Graeme." It seemed to occur to neither of them by this that considering the casualness of the acquaintance the character of the conversation was becoming extraordinary.

"I'm perfectly sure. If I thought she had any such feeling I'd consider it my duty—"

"Need we talk of duty, Mr. Beech?"

"I stick to the word, Mrs. Graeme. My duty to warn her—to warn her—"

She laughed. "Is that perfect loyalty to your partner, do you think?"

"Loyalty? I owe no loyalty—none where none is given! Oh, yes! I know you think I am talking oddly. I don't care! I say I'd do a great deal to save her, Miss Senior I mean—"

"Oh, yes, I guessed whom you meant!"

"To save her from being involved in—in that way."

"But suppose she *wanted* to be involved—even

that her friends would like to see her involved in that way——”

“I deny the possibility of either.”

“Are you, Mr. Beech, do you think, keeping strictly in mind *her* interests, by the way?”

“Certainly I am. Of course I am——”

Netta considered for a moment before continuing; then turning about and resting those small white hands on the table so that they glowed pale against the mahogany, she seemed to take a stance. Setting her eyes full upon him, she drew in a breath as if preparing herself for a struggle, and then: “I wonder if we could be quite frank, Mr. Beech?”

“Well?” He said the word sharply, as if challenging her. It seemed as if he prepared to hold her off.

“Then, if we are to be frank—is your interest in my friend Lesley so impersonal?”

“You are trying to suggest——”

“That the knight would like the lady for himself.”

“I don’t—that is—— But rather than see her——”

“Wait. What you mean is this. If she won’t have you, she shall not have Mr. Boxrider. Rather than Boxrider, *anybody*.”

He looked at her suddenly. Perhaps he had once heard a rumour; perhaps his dilated consciousness enabled him to read what, ordinarily, none could see. Certainly it was his turn.

“Anybody?” he repeated. “Yes, I’d give her to anybody—Coleton.”

He had the satisfaction of seeing her wince. But Netta at once recovered any calm she may have lost.

“You want Coleton to have her?”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“Coleton wants her, and if—if—”

“*You can't, he* may as well. Well, but—but—”

“You will fight me,” he burst in. She flamed, but she held her head up. The worst of disputing with madmen was that you could not use the disguises convention dictated.

“Yes,” he cried again, “you'll fight!”

“Fight! I will see that that doesn't happen. I will see that!” She *was* roused.

“Yes, Mrs. Graeme, I think you will—if you can do anything.”

“I wonder if you want to serve her. And, if so, I wonder”—she had forced herself under control again, she had found the old slow utterance—“I wonder why you prefer Mr. Coleton?”

She was gentle, reflective—even seemed to invite slow, unstudied confidences. And her voice had a note of seeking him out; its tenderness drew him in spite of himself. Confide? Almost at once his changing mind seemed to find a new mood.

“Mrs. Graeme,” he said, “you see in me one who hates—yes, *hates*—his own profession.” A grimace. “To see her surrendered to—to that man! Coleton, at least, is free from that thing—is the enemy of it: the thing to which I am bound—this—this publicity—”

“Are you so sure?” She came closer, looking

keenly into his eyes, and certainly—she was certain of it—he winced. But he thrust up his head all the same.

“Sure? That he is the enemy of that horrible vulgarity, that misuse of beauty and art. . . . Isn’t his life a testimony?”

Netta paused, as if considering. It was, though, a dramatized consideration.

“Mr. Beech,” she began at last, gently, “I wonder if you ever heard a story about a certain agent—an advertisement agent, I think he called himself, or was it a publicity merchant?—the senior partner.”

“Publicity merchant,” he stood back quickly, repeating his words irresolutely, “publicity merchant—senior partner. What do you mean?”

“I wonder if you can guess what I mean?” She peered at him, her back inclined so as to allow of her craning her head forward. He seemed to feel himself exposed, studied; and his tongue stammered out at last:

“You needn’t go on, I think . . . I—in fact—”

“But you asked me.” She was not prepared to relax now. “Yes, a publicity merchant. This gentleman found advertising of the ordinary sort vulgar. But literary advertisement, by means of paragraphs for the setting forth of the fine qualities of a not-necessarily-to-be-mentioned great man, *not* vulgar. Remunerative, but not vulgar. . . . Though,” with a smile of content, “I’m not sure that remuneration *was* the consideration. Nor was it, perhaps, simple devotion of the not-necessarily-to-be-men-

tioned great man. When you don't want to challenge a man openly there is a subtle pleasure—I don't say for brave men but for others—in secretly setting at defiance the person you don't care to challenge direct."

"Dare!" That was the word he had caught hold of; and he stood there, his lips twitching, and his mind plainly seeking for a reply that should save him from envelopment.

"Yes—dare. You can challenge by writing letters to the paper. You can challenge by doing work which the other person doesn't—shall we say?—approve of." She paused. "I think, Mr. Beech, I really think, that you don't need any further explanations."

He looked at her with the same irresolution. ("Rather like a muddled Spanish bull with the dart in him," she said afterwards. "He wanted to charge, to make an end of me; but he was too distracted to know how and where to throw himself.")

"You know a lot—or think you do. I don't know how you—"

"How I know? Do you mean you deny? As a matter of fact, journalists hear all sorts of funny little stories, and if they are your friends they will sometimes tell you. People who labour in secret to help the fame of their—do you say, by the way, 'friends' or 'clients'?—mustn't mind if some day they become famous themselves. As for the letter, I read the correspondence; and, after all, the style is the man. It occurred to me that this particular

man *might* rush in and, well, the letter rather announced itself. Disgusted . . . you *were* disgusted. And now, having explained at such length, I will merely ask if I have invented."

Beech's answer was characteristic. He turned suddenly and walked to the door. On the threshold he muttered a "Good day," and before Netta could intervene further he was away into the hall and opening the outer door.

"Mr. Beech," for there were other things she had it in her to say. But the only answer was the sharp closing of a door and the beat of departing feet outside.

Netta turned back into the room. There was a light in her eyes. It might have been decided by an observer that she was not displeased.

III

There were things now to be considered. Suppose she told Lesley the truth. It did not follow at all that the effect would be what she wanted. . . . What she wanted! She began to know how much she did want that. Because if Lesley did turn away from him. . . . Only, *did* women turn away from men who failed them? For failure in the vigour of a love gesture perhaps. But for anything else? For a mere failure in moral value?

Desperately as she wanted to believe that, she found herself incapable. Lesley was like any other woman. Netta considered herself: did she see her-

self affected as she wished Lesley to be affected? Was she, as a matter of fact, in the smallest degree "put off" Coleton because she knew and had known for long that his "campaign," as he called it, was an imposture?

And would any woman love the man the less for a thing of that sort, or find such a fault anything but an irrelevance?

She could not believe it.

And yet if she told Lesley, and Lesley was affected in that way and turned away from Claude Coleton, she could then begin to flatter her hopes. She could not see Claude spending himself where he perceived that the offering was not wanted. She would have liked—any woman would—to have recaptured him from her friend. That, certainly, she would not in the circumstances be able to do. Of that perfect and exquisite experience there was no hope while Claude was in his present mood. But if only Lesley would dismiss him, Netta thought she could trust his egotism to take his dismissal at once and look elsewhere for his woman—and find her where *she* was. She was ready at last to acknowledge that she wanted him now on any terms—rejected or not of another.

But she must study how to introduce the matter. There was, to encourage her, the idea she had had of Lesley in relation to—others. That glib young man. But when she mentioned Claude's name it was only to bring back quick smiles into Lesley's face.

"Did Claude say what day he would be back?"

"Oh! he thinks on Thursday. They wanted him to stay over the week-end. That is the worst of popularity, I suppose," with a further smile.

"Yes, I suppose so. . . . By the way, that Mr. Beech came to-day." Very calmly—too calmly for Netta, seeing that with Beech was involved another. Lesley looked up.

"Whatever did he want—not to see me?"

"Yes, poor thing! His dreadful partner"—she paused, but there was no protest from Lesley to-day at the characterization—"his dreadful partner was, he wanted you to know, entirely responsible for dragging you into their enterprises."

"I thought," said Lesley a little wearily, "that was all settled and done with."

"Possibly. I don't know. He seemed excited, poor man! He doesn't like his profession, I'm afraid; and yet it is a very necessary profession. Everybody advertises nowadays. . . ." She began to go very carefully now and kept watching eyes on the girl as she spoke. "Everybody—even those who profess not to. . . . Why, wouldn't it be funny if some day you found that even Claude—"

Lesley flushed up suddenly. "That is a very unnecessary and really rather stupid thing to say, Netta. I wouldn't mind your saying it if Claude hadn't taken the stand he has. I know lots of people have to do it. And, in a way, it is perfectly legitimate. But when you suggest *Claude* does it, you're making him—well, a blazing insincerity! So it is a stupid

thing to say. If I did not know you so well I'd even say that it wasn't the kind of thing that anybody——”

“Who was anybody, *would* say?” put in Netta softly. “No! Perhaps not. I wonder?” She smiled softly to herself and then moved hummingly across the room.

“You mean something.” The charge—it was almost that—came from Lesley.

But Netta continued on her way, came to the door, and only then, smiling mysteriously, looked back.

“Mean something. I am still left wondering, my dear, *what* I mean. I am not a precisian,” and so she went out.

And so an idea had been planted. Or had it? She was not at all confident really. She must try again: wait for a really happy opening and try again.

But when one waits to execute a design it happens sometimes that in some other quarter forces are preparing to execute just such a design.

CHAPTER XXII

I

THE mind of Beech, when he had gone out of the flat at Chelsea in escape from Netta's eye and question, was in a mere confusion. But once outside in the street he was consciously the helpless victim of ideas which now threatened to bear him away out of the quiet stream of reason and reality. He felt extraordinarily abased by a double consciousness of failure—failure in his encounter with Mrs. Graeme, but failure, too, in his general handling of his own life. He was appalled by his own spiritual incompetence; he found himself completely ineffective; he tasted the ultimate in humiliation. For a whole night and a day and another night he tasted it. The gloom by which he began to be enclosed seemed to him to have some new quality—some kind of impenetrability. Before, when these clouds had come about him, he had sometimes seen some kind of a way out. He could see none now. It was a bank of night, a prison-house of darkness whose walls were almost literally objective. He had an idea that if he were to feel with physical hands he could touch something there—something that condemned him for ever to this eternal gloom.

Only now and again came there a flash of red light

to give a false illumination in the blackness. It sprang out—that sudden flame—as his mind, turning upon a quest for an explanation, found it as often it had found it before. . . . These things were the work of one mind and hand—the same mind and hand which always had worked his humiliation. He improvised for himself an unreal detachment, and then imagined himself observing, judging, and presently condemning his partner with an assurance that he was being not less than just.

But this illusion of maintaining a detachment vanished almost at once. The objectivity with which he professed to consider his partner was turned into something entirely subjective—an almost normal enmity. No longer did he profess justice. He did not care whether he hated fairly; he knew only this: that he hated. He was trapped; there was no outlet of escape, and the enemy who had trapped him, him, he told himself, he knew.

For an hour he walked the streets with eyes that saw only darknesses, depths of pits. He had very little realization where he was when, looking up, he found himself in the Strand and approaching his own office. It was then that, lifting his eyes, he became aware of the very hoarding whose part is not inconsiderable in the lives of certain others than himself.

“Lesley.” He said the words with the hot passion of the denied. He could see her work hanging there, and that other thing—the greater outrage against decency and art. Boxrider’s achievement—

all of it. He thought of that name "Lesley," and by a supreme effort of self-torturing egotism he thrust his partner's name against hers. Then with a rebound of satisfaction he took that name away and put forward "Coleton." And at *that* conjunction—"Lesley" and "Coleton"—Boxrider must suffer as *he* was doing. No, but Boxrider could not have the capacity for suffering that he had. *Could not.*

Boxrider, too, threw things off. Smug. That was the fellow. If he was defeated. . . . But suppose . . . a cold terror came upon him—the terror which had visited him before. That invincibility of Boxrider's. Suppose—but he would not frame the thought. Only a great wave of new hate seemed to rise within him as he remembered that man's habit of victory. . . .

With the febrile agility of men in his condition his mind went on assembling charges against that assured young man, multiplying proofs, screaming judgments. He had always hated him—yes. But that early hatred had been lyric love compared with what was in his heart against the man now. Boxrider had always humiliated him. From the beginning he had made him ridiculous; lowered his prestige, even with the staff. In all his conduct of business he had ignored him; or when he had to take account of him, as when the Kingfords' business had been introduced, he had taken it on his own shoulders. And then there were those protests of his against his junior's general policy. They had no effect be-

cause he had no authority—no moral suasion—with his partner. So that here was another humiliation in the ever-present thought of his complete failure in moral authority, his own irredeemable feebleness.

But there was a more subtle humiliation in Boxrider's treatment of him. It could have been called an artistically perfect humiliation were it not that that art involves the idea of deliberation at some stage or other; and there was no deliberation here. He could have wished there had been, for that would have discounted the effect. A man who ignores you in order to humiliate you is paying you a compliment. You have enough of—what shall it be called?—consequence for him to wish to reduce your sense of your consequence.

But Boxrider merely humiliated without seeming to know it. Which brings one to another leading fact in the indictment: Boxrider had not only humiliated him, he had by means of the humiliation wrought in his senior a hatred so intense as to have overwhelmed in him certain spiritual and artistic restraints. (How else had he found himself unable to rebut Netta Graeme?)

So that, in effect, Boxrider had not even allowed him the use of his moral consciousness.

And finally, Boxrider had stood in his way in that hour of his first meeting with Lesley, when there *had* been a chance for himself. She might have been his; she might have married him. For the one and only time in his life he had felt powerful. He could have persuaded her to open the gates of her heart.

[And when, as it had appeared, the siege was laid, from another quarter had come that other force—a force which had not asked her to open, but if it had not conquered her, had at least so contrived things as to have ended *his* chances. It was once again and finally that sheer masculine strength, that bold unwavering assurance, that almost terrible determination which had given Boxrider so many previous victories.

Beech still seemed to be standing there before the hoarding—that high, glowing, significant, blatant, challenging thing, the symbol of all he hated. Now finding himself here, he burst away with his heart hammering so that he wondered people did not stop to listen in affright. He knew, by some obscure process of consciousness—the means by which we are able to envisage our appearance without aid of mirror—that he looked, somehow, odd. He knew it too from glimpses of himself in the glass of other men's eyes. Mad? A mere term, a sorry conclusion of comparative psychology!

All the same, he was not normal. The veins in his temples were so swollen now that he almost expected to find his cheeks running with blood from those burst veins. Mad—yes; violently he came back to the word, and this time he owned the charge.

“Beaten by that partner of his,” this was the instinctively self-abasing conclusion he came to; but in the moment of lowest self-abasement came a miracle. Yes, in terms of anything but the divine—a miracle.

Those new ideas springing up like flames. That quick-glancing Beauty.

II

His mind had always been extraordinarily susceptible to moods; and just as the pendulum swings furthest right when it has just swung furthest left, so now his mind passed from the depths into equally intoxicating heights, and then back into the deeps.

Hatred of Boxrider had ultimately blotted out even an idea of a cause for the hatred. It became a settled assumption. Hate. Hurrying from that vision of the hoarding he must have walked the streets swiftly, racing the hours that themselves flew. But presently he began to be oppressed by a conviction that he came near to a climax—something by which he would be involved, something the outlines of which nevertheless he could not see. It may have struck him, himself, as odd if for a moment he had enough detachment (and in our worst moments we have such detachments) that anything should seem certainly so near and yet so entirely hidden. It was like driving through mist in a high land from which broke precipices.

An idea that presently certainly began to occupy him again was that of Boxrider's invincibility. Boxrider had always won. . . . But he was not going to win in this matter of Lesley. (How his poor confused mind consoled itself.) Lesley would marry Coleton. And yet Coleton was not the man she de-

sired. How did he know? Had not he always known? No, not because Mrs. Graeme had told him. He had known from the beginning, instinctively.

Those two were drawn to one another. She had always been interested. . . .

And if she knew about Coleton . . . that would open her eyes now instead of afterwards. Her eyes would be open some day. No woman could have happiness with Coleton. He knew Coleton . . . knew him. Knew perhaps more than Netta did.

And that girl was to go to Coleton. . . . Boxrider was to be beaten. He exulted again. Love. *He* had been starved always. Let that other man starve. . . . And *let her*—she who had denied him.

And it was now at last that there came that doubt. To his confused intelligence it was less a doubt than a challenge. Words of Netta Graeme's had come back: "I wonder if you want to serve her?"

In a flash he knew that he *did*. He could not think why he had not protested against her doubt then. But he had not protested because he remembered he had himself under sufficient control to see that she was planning a trap—some kind of a trap.

But in the frantic state he had got himself into now he told himself that he could protest loudly. Did he want to serve her? Did he? Serve her? It was his only thought.

A mind on the borderland of sanity is extraordinarily swept by alternations of emotion. Mastered by one prevailing thought one moment, it may be swept by another a moment later.

He had a habit of dramatizing his own future—particularly his remoter future. Often, for an example, he would see himself in possession of retirement, leisure, a small house in the country; and then he'd project a picture of himself as host, welcoming persons he had known in this present sordid life; while he read in their minds appreciation of the fact that only now was he enclosed by his appropriate environment, that only now did he breathe his proper atmosphere. ("We always felt he was a—gentleman.") Appreciation, yes, and admiration—even envy.

But now his highly dilated mind, with its vision of Lesley Senior, began to invent extravagances. . . . Presently extravagances of devotion a raw habit, something boy-like. But remember that here was really a first passion, and that in a mind never, in the ordinary sense, mature—a mind of some finesse certainly, but with much undevlopment. This poor knight was even ready to die for the lady.

Death is always the easiest way out for a confused romanticist! It is curious how the psychology of a man who has lived an unknowing life so far as women are concerned for thirty-five years may, when passion comes, approximate to that of youth. . . .

He began to be taken with strange ambitions to do things for her and die. Why had he been born into a century where there were none of those false knights whom Galahad slew? (He had read Tennyson. He would like to talk to women about Tennyson in the evening light.)

He would like to see her falling, and catch her; drowning, and rescue her; on some high storey of a burning house, and carry her to the ground.

He could do none of these things.

What was he doing, as a matter of fact? He could put that question to himself at certain mental intervals. And when the question next came he found it answered. What was he doing? He was letting her go to Coleton—willing her person, her beauty, her spirit, the whole of her bright reality to pass into the possession of that man. Ingenuous as was his mind in some matters, he perfectly realized Coleton. And he had heard things too. Some day she would realize Coleton. Some day she would not need to hear things. She would know. Yet he was willing her to go to Coleton though Coleton was not even her man. Her man was. . . .

But he could not admit that. He stopped. Only, try as he would, he could not set against Boxrider what he was forced to set against Coleton. She must have a life of bitter misery at last with Coleton: a life of—yes, with a compulsion of dislike he owned it—a life of normal happiness with the other man. And he was willing her to Coleton! Thus at least he characterized his attitude.

He tried to execute a mental gesture appropriate to a physical shrug of shoulders; and in any case, he reminded himself, Netta Graeme threatened to speak.

So that the girl would be warned. Only—suppose Netta Graeme, for some mysterious purpose of her own (and she was sufficiently mysterious, he had

found), or because at last she feared the effect which her intervention would have upon Coleton's attitude towards herself, did not speak. That girl would never know—in time. Yes, that child. . . .

(He had slipped into that odd protectiveness quite suddenly.)

He could have saved her. . . . Could he, though? He fought that. She would never believe him. He thrust aside these thoughts.

But he still walked on with an unnatural energy, still troubled himself immensely with that responsibility of which, with such abruptness, he had become conscious. And only at last did he, turning his eye about, discover that he knew the street in which he walked. By a not inexplicable impulse he had been making his way into Chelsea. . . . This street he knew. And over there was a building, a familiar outline of stone with a doorway through which he had never gone without a moral excitement.

Who shall explain how, in a disturbed mind, the true mood of sacrifice may suddenly impose itself upon unreality; how a sick mentality may receive again a quickening of life and health?

III

Haggard, yellow, with flaming bloodshot eyes and twitching lips, he stood there trying to master his utterance. The girl who had opened to his knock felt those over-bright eyes—reflecting a mind aflame

—full upon her; and already she was alarmed, alarmed for him, alarmed for some vaguely conceived-of world outside, as we are when suddenly brought into contact with one who carries in him some sign of having flung himself or been flung from the intellectual comity of his kind.

“Did you want”—she paused—but found herself yielding him admission. And he bore in upon her, taking up space in the white-and-gold hall with a thrust back of an excited hand, opposing, as it seemed, something obscure and sombre to this palleness and glitter, and then closing the door. She scarcely realized that she led him into the sitting-room. Yet there he seemed to be standing at last. And all the time he was plainly fighting to master some immense excitement.

“There’s something”—he stopped—“there’s something I want—no, I don’t want. Yes, I do. I want to say. I want because—it’s because you are involved. Not for him. No.”

“I don’t understand you, I’m afraid, Mr. Beech.” She was not frightened now, but she was genuinely distressed by his condition. He talked like a child—with as little subtlety, as little steadiness.

“Understand? No, I’m sure you don’t. How could you? You don’t know what I’ve been—I mean you can’t read my thoughts till I’ve told ‘em. But I’ve got something that ought to be said. . . . You’re going to be married, aren’t you?”

Lesley examined his face calmly. “It has been known for some time, I think, that I am en——”

“Engaged to that—to Mr. Coleton. Yes. That’s what I mean. Well, you can’t be——”

“I really must say, Mr. Beech, if that is what——”

“Oh, I know all that!” he cried impatiently. “But—I—I tell you, you can’t marry that—that impostor.”

“Impostor? What do you mean? I really must refuse to hear anything more. I know you are not very well, Mr. Beech, but even so——”

“I stick to my word!” cried Beech. “You can’t stop me till I’ve told you. You’ve got to hear—you *must* hear! Do you think I come to tell you for fun? Think what it might mean to me! Not that that will have any meaning for you. . . . How should it?” He said the last words with an odd detachment as if he stood there reflecting. . . . “But I’ve got to speak. I can’t go on. She’s told me too much. I wanted to fight her. But she’s made me see. And I want to see you happy. Oh, yes, I’m going! I’ve no control. I don’t know all I’m saying, but I wanted you to know some things. The first is about—about Coleton paying to get himself written up.”

“I don’t know what that means,” burst in the girl suddenly, furiously, “but it’s plainly a lie.”

“A lie? It is nothing of the kind. He does it always. He’s paid hundreds.”

“You can’t prove it.”

“Prove it? Oh, yes, Miss Senior, I can prove it. Because, you see, of late he has paid me.”

“You?”

“Yes, I, Miss Senior. I.”

"And—and Mr. Boxrider, I suppose?"

"Oh, Boxrider! No, *he* wouldn't do it. I mean"—(for even in this moment of not unheroic sacrifice he jibbed against an acknowledgment of his partner's authority)—"I mean he thought we weren't the people for the business, and"—by an enormous effort he got out the further words—"and, in fact he refused to touch it . . . I—I knew that he didn't care about it being done. That was one reason why——"

"But I thought," she burst in at this point, though with little intent to save him from confession, "that Mr. Boxrider was what you called *on the side of* this—this publicity in everything?"

"So he is. But"—for a moment he hesitated again, then continued in apparent bitter self-despite—"but according to his lights he's what I suppose you'd call honest. He's never done this kind of thing. It's legitimate, he'd tell you, for any man to advertise himself so long as he doesn't pretend he doesn't do it." (Can't you see the man grinding out those tributes?) "But—but he said we'd no means of sorting out the—humbugs! That was his idea—his scruple."

"But I thought *you* had scruples, Mr. Beech."

"Scruples? Oh, yes!" with a laugh. "I had scruples. But when a man comes to you with the work. . . . Besides, he—I mean Coleton—wanted me because he knew I'd scruples. He worked on me. 'You can't do these things because you dare not face Boxrider.' And I wasn't to be threatened with Box-

rider. And I wanted to strike out a line of my own. And this seemed an escape from—from cocoa.”

“Well?”

“Well, I took on the work. I was Coleton’s man. I advertised him. I advertised him secretly as the man who hated advertisements—who’d kill me if I advertised him. He never came into it. He was just the manipulator in the background. I got up stunts. I got up that campaign against Boxrider’s use of the Courtenay. I even wrote one of the letters myself—was glad to do that too. Well, there was, you see, sincerity in what I did. I did hate those things. There never was any sincerity in what *he* did.”

“It’s all untrue,” she said determinedly.

“Is it?” He peered at her. “Ask Coleton. Yes, get Mrs. Graeme into the room and ask him then.”

“Mrs. Graeme,” she spoke with a swift, cold, feminine curiosity: “what has Mrs. Graeme——”

“To do with it? Ask her! Ask her if she knows about me and Coleton. Yes, ask her, particularly, if she can tell you anything about the articles on your man where it’s said he will never allow himself to be written up. That was an inspiration of his own. Let’s”—with the first trace of irony to be discoverable in his voice—“Let’s give the artist his due. And he paid well for that.”

“How do you know that?”

“Because the money was paid to me.”

“And you who hated these things——”

“Yes, I took the money. But I thought it was nearer literature—yes, literature—what it sounds

like when put like that! But I wasn't only thinking of the literary side, though you don't know how I wanted to find some little element of dignity in my job. No, you'll never understand what I'm trying to say. But I *am* trying to say everything. And if I say everything, I've got to say this—to admit it if you like. I wanted to show independence of—of my partner. Oh, I know what you'll say! It wasn't independence since I didn't tell him. But then you don't know, and it wouldn't interest you to know, certain things about my mind. And, well—after that I did a good deal for Coleton, for the man who doesn't allow advertising. And—that's the man he is."

"He isn't."

"Well, I've told you. If you don't challenge him now—"

He moved to the door. "You think I'm malicious. I'm not. I wish the man was straight. But I know too much. And I didn't want you to find out—afterwards."

She would have detained him with a word, but while yet she tried to speak he had slipped from the room. The next moment she heard the front door bang. He was gone.

And in ten minutes there was to be—Claude: Claude in new and notable circumstances; Claude with a ring-measurement card. For that point of climax really seemed near.

IV

Claude came in rather hurriedly. The fact was he required contact with Lesley to reinforce his courage. Whenever he had time for consideration—whenever, at least, he achieved that obscurely-won mood—he found himself unsettled again, hesitant, playing with the idea of delay. Then knowing himself enough to have a notion of his normal attitude towards these important facts of his life, he would know that what he contemplated was a betrayal not only of her hopes but his own. If he married her he might afterwards have regrets; but if he did not marry her, certainly if he left her to someone else to marry, he certainly would have regrets. It was a dilemma from which, at one time, he could have trusted himself as a man of the world to have evaded. But he could see no evasion now. All he could discover was the imperative need to go back and recover his resolve—which he could always do by a sight of her.

All the same, he wished that he had been involved in some situation a little less obvious than the one in which actually he was caught. Wedding ring measurements—there was about such things something not merely so crude, but so unspeakably bourgeois. It made him feel a degree ludicrous, and certainly he felt trapped.

But it seemed as if no longer could these things be held off.

V

The girl waited for his coming. And she sat there with a sense of growing serenity. Just for a moment in the onrush of Beech's attack she had been troubled. But the sheer stupidity of the charge was now proclaimed to her. Of certain minor weaknesses she could imagine Claude being assured. There were people who called him an egotist. She could quite happily call him that herself. He really had a right to take himself seriously, and even to bestow some admiration on the character of his own mental processes, his methods of projection of his art; he had certainly such a right having regard to the reality of his influence upon his generation. But Beech, in his insane malice, had trumped up the one charge from which Claude was most completely certain to be innocent. She could think of no superlative strong enough to give emphasis to her conviction of his innocence in that matter; wasn't he the acknowledged leader of a stand against the blatancy and vulgarity of modern advertising? She even laughed gently in her security, and had leisure to bestow a little pity on Beech. Quite clearly the poor man's mind was affected. She was perfectly aware that by unfortunate chance she had been involved in certain of his mental disturbances. She could remember how he had held her hand in that hot, twitching grasp of his. She knew what he meant . . . and now in despair he must slander. . . . To slander

seemed to come natural to him. Even his partner had not been spared. . . .

But she was not afraid for Claude. And now, as if bringing up an unneeded reinforcement, there came Claude in at the doorway, smiling now and certainly confident with the ring card in his hand. He had just taken it out to give the needed note of special significance to his entry.

VI

Claude moved across the room confidently—an observer not necessarily won to his side had once spoken of his “pale pomposity.” So, to-night, he came. Certainly an extraordinarily handsome man. The girl must have thought so often before. And it is scarcely to be supposed that he was unconscious of the fact. The entire room was bristling with consciousness of his beauty, and whispering its joyous discoveries in his ear. He missed nothing—not even the delicacy of the manicured fingers which held the card. He made it his business to observe himself. He knew how he crossed a room, how he sat down, how he looked in profile, how in full face. He sometimes regretted his profile; the chin was not entirely distinguished. He presented his profile to such persons as he was not concerned to please. But he gave Lesley always a full face aspect. He was careful to do so to-day.

As to whether anything in her face held him back for a moment neither was afterwards very clear.

But if checked for that instant he indubitably recovered at once, advancing with a sort of magnificence.

“My dear, I have brought it. I mean the card”—he began to be explanatory suddenly as if he perceived that his meaning had not reached to her mind—“the card for the—ring.” (“Wedding ring” sounded so middle-class, so—definite. To be definite was to be so—vulgar. That little hesitation was so much better.)

She was smiling. The ring? Why, of course, was in her mind. That was what she wanted in order to clear her mind of this fog—no, not of doubt—she didn’t doubt him—but of other people’s doubts. She came forward a step, moved by reaction from Beech’s whispers. She felt confident. She welcomed. Her eyes covered him, measured him. He was a fine-looking thing, with splendour of bearing; quite apart from being wrapt in a certain majesty of reputation . . . a figure . . . she was proud of him, sure of him. He even took on a kind of splendour from the talk of Beech, as if the coat of dishonour his enemies had spun for him had grown into something glorious. . . .

Yet there was something to be got over . . . a mere formality, and she resolved to get it over now. If she delayed she would find it impossible, and she wanted to be able to refute Beech.

“There’s something . . . Claude . . . before we come to *that*.”

She nodded towards the card he had begun to

draw from his pocket. "I know it'll all sound to you absurd. Only there's been a man—a man here who said something about you. Of course it's a lie. But I dare say I'm nervy to-day. . . . It's a special occasion, isn't it?" trying to smile.

He smiled back, though there was a slight confusion in the manner—the confusion though, as she decided, of a mind supremely fine which has a difficulty in comprehending the mean conceits and jealousies of lesser men.

"Why, of course it's a special occasion." Didn't he know it?—he who liked not such special occasions—only the continual tendency towards such. "And as for a man's talking about me—if you mean somebody's been slandering me—well, it's the lot of those of us who—who emerge." (Sufficiently modest characterization of a situation!)

"Slander. Yes, that's what it is, Claude. But I'll tell you. . . . He said—you—you—you won't mind my telling you, will you, and then it will be done with? He said you'd employed him—his name is Beech and he's a partner with Mr. Boxrider—you'd paid him money to advertise you."

She waited in an expectation that was almost tranquil for the dissipation of the lie, for its swift destruction. Only after a full moment did she feel that first, strange doubt. For Claude laughed.

"Is that all? Is that what he said? Well, that, surely, doesn't amount to a charge of any kind, does it?" He began comfortably to come nearer. "That doesn't amount to a charge."

She looked at him now in mere astonishment. He had not denied the thing: had not been at pains to do so.

“A charge? No. I’m told people have to do these things. But these people don’t—don’t *denounce other people for doing it*; and, you see, you do.”

“So in my case it *does* amount to a charge?”

“I—I thought—it did,” she was beginning, when he put in with a wave of a hand which, as she discovered only afterwards for the first time (so far as she was able to remember), seemed to her to be fat.

“But what of it?” he said. “It’s done, as you say. We all have to do it—have to do it.”

It seemed to her now as if the entire room about her was beginning to be mysteriously involved in some extraordinary modification of the relations between herself and that man. And didn’t he see—didn’t he understand to what all these admissions tended?—that indeed everything was being swept into the stream of ideas of which Beech had been the source.

“You don’t mean that, Claude.” She was astonished at the apparent remoteness of her voice as if she spoke across a continent now—a continent that would, in another moment, be a universe.

“Mean it!” he laughed. “Of course I mean it. I tell you”—advancing the step which should now enable him to draw her to him—“I tell you it’s what we all do, and have to do. Why, my dear child, it’s done, I tell you! I’ve written about myself before to-day! It’s done, I tell you.”

“But you miss *the point*, Claude. I’m not discussing whether it’s done. I’m talking about its being done by you”—some remote voice seemed to be mocking her—she with that duty of accuser thrust upon her. And why should she have to do these things?—“done by *you after all you’ve said*. You can’t have done it. *Can’t!*” She kept reiterating that now stupidly, dully.

“Can’t!” he cried, the familiar little pucker perceptible in his fine brow. “Why not, pray?”

“Why? Don’t you see? You’ve always been *against* all kinds of advertising. You’re known—why, Claude, you’re FAMOUS for your opposition.”

He smiled easily. He was still assured, still unwarmed by that note in her voice which must have caught the attention of another type of intelligence—one more detached from its possessor.

“See? I see that, my dearest, my bride”—(he was sufficiently moved to allow the word to pass his lips)—“my bride is being absurd. I suppose, to try me.” He came closer now with his hands out, and she fell back two steps.

“No, Claude. Please wait.”

“Need we, though, trouble ourselves to-day with these paltry matters? Surely, darling, when your—your Claude brings you the means whereby you shall measure your finger for the symbol—the supreme symbol”—(he could not refrain for long, ever, from dropping into book language—the language of *his* kind, in books)—“the supreme symbol whereby you will show to the world that you are his——”

"No, Claude, wait. It isn't a petty thing. I mean in your case. It would be—yes—in other people's. But not in yours. After your professions it can't be trivial in your case."

Worlds were crashing about her. Petty? "It's awfully serious to me. I—I have pictured you, imagined you—as being a certain thing, and you're *not* that thing."

"What!" For the first time a real uneasiness showed in his manner. "What? because of what that idiot tells you—?"

"You mean"—for she was struggling for the relief his words would bring—"you mean he *did* invent it all?"

"Invent?"

"I mean, if I challenged him to produce proofs he would have had to own he'd lied."

Coleton hesitated; and in that hesitation more than in anything else she read her final answer.

"I don't say he couldn't produce—some papers. But what I want you to realize is that even so I've done nothing. I've got to live. And a man can't live in my profession *without* doing these things."

"But *you've always said*, Claude, that every form of advertising—of doing the things you now say you do—was—was horrible."

"Well, perhaps," with a laugh, "one has to take a line or people will refuse to be interested in one."

"And you mean it was all a pose?" She said the words slowly; but there was judgment in the utterance; and at last he recognized that there was.

"A pose!" he cried. "No; it wasn't a pose. Advertising on hoardings is vulgar and detestable and——"

"I can't discuss it any more, Claude. You see things—things are changing—have changed."

"Changed? For a mere absurdity—a sorry little lie of a half-witted——"

"But it isn't a lie. You've acknowledged that what he said was true. Only—you see, Claude, you don't look at things in the same light as I do."

"No," he said, standing very straight now and bending upon her, by a supreme effort of his almost superb egotism, that minatory aspect the sight of which must have reminded her of the Claude who had reproved her for the sale of her picture. "No, I do not, I rejoice to say, see things in the same light as you. But I am ready to believe, my dear, that the present occasion, being a very special one in your life——"

"Please, Claude . . . wait." She was struggling to find words, even to achieve a situation sufficiently static to allow of her getting some kind of perspective of these new, swift-moving ideas. But her very foundations seemed to be shifting. "I think," she went on at last, "it would be better if you went away for this morning."

"You really mean that?"

He put the demand shrilly at last, really taken out of the area of that vast self-consciousness of his. She may even have heard his words as a cry—a cry

of pain; and certainly he was pale now, really disturbed. But she held to her request.

“Yes, please go away. Now. I must think.”

“But it’s absurd!” He began to plead, to put his hands upon her shoulders with a strange, sickening sense of doing sweet things for the last time—she meantime trying to evade him, and retreating. Could not she, she was asking herself, get him away? Suddenly she remembered. Netta must be due back. Only two hours before—about a million years ago as it seemed—Netta had said she would be back at twelve. She had thought it slightly unnecessary for Netta to plan a return so soon—a characteristic small maliciousness. . . . But Netta could come back to forgiveness now; and in the meantime Claude stood before her, seeming to plead still.

“It’s ridiculous. Don’t you see how insignificant it all is beside the things we are really thinking about?”

In his alarm he was dropping the language of his books. But her own distress was too great for her to catch new accents.

“I can’t see that it is insignificant. It would be so in the case of anybody else. But it can’t be in your case and with your professions. If one thinks of a man as being this and one finds he is that—you see it’s——”

“Lesley! Lesley! Don’t go away out of my life!”

Was this mere drama—the “spun” egotist fighting to hold his place or—

Click! The sharp, bright note of a key being turned in the front door. Netta—and rescue! The man understood even as Lesley did.

“One word. Here’s somebody coming, Lesley. Promise you’ll hear me. You’ll—you’ll suspend judgment!”

He to have to ask for a suspension of judgment! Even in his deep distress—and it *had* depth—he may have been made aware of a certain irony in that circumstance. *He* to be pleading for the maintenance of a relation with a woman! It is possible to conceive of some remoter sense within him, some minor officer of his subconsciousness, fussily seeking for record of a precedent. But she was speaking coldly, dismissingly.

“I can’t promise to think that you haven’t admitted what you have admitted. . . . Ah, Netta!”

For there stood Netta Graeme smiling in the doorway—smiling and wearing the air of the kindly tolerant friend breaking in on lovers; smiling still a moment later, yet already aware of something new in the elements of the situation, and seeking with swift secret energy to discover and characterize the novelty lest it should contribute to her own interest. ‘After all, she had reason to be hopeful.

“You’re not going?” This sweetly to Claude, who, to the fresh excitement of her curiosity, was self-consciously groping for his hat for all the world like a rejected suitor in some funny lower middle-class romance where they picture such gaucheries as a regular thing.

Claude Coleton laughed a laugh a study of which, by a shrewd mind, would have yielded some contribution to the new conception of this man hitherto so securely based upon self-content. Coleton's laughs were small, highly significant things, recognized by his followers as the deliberate gestures of a highly persistent and governing ego. But this laugh was merely the laugh of a discomfited and defeated man.

“Yes, I'm going. I'd”—with an attempt to recapture ease of manner—“I'd overstayed my time. So don't be unjust and say I fly because you return.”

With some such talk he got himself to the door, turned then, once, a troubled eye (as it seemed to the curious Netta) upon Lesley, called a “good-bye” with something of the checked gaiety of a bird with its wing broken, and was gone.

At a distance Lesley had begun following him out. She meant to escape to her room before Netta, whose bright eye told of a curiosity and of an intent, could get in her questions.

As Coleton pulled the outer door behind him, Lesley reached the threshold of the room.

“Claude *was* in a hurry, this morning! Whatever have you been doing to the poor dear?”

“Doing?” Lesley had turned in the doorway to glance back, but she did not look into Netta's eyes, whereat that shrewd woman was pleased, for now she had further confirmation. “Doing? Have I been doing anything?”

“Why, my dear, you don't realize it, perhaps. But you must have been doing wonders actually.

It's no little achievement for a woman to send away a confused Claude. A confused Claude was always a contradiction in terms when I knew anything of him."

"When you knew anything of him." Lesley repeated the words with an immense gravity which may have seemed odd. There was something old and judicial about the manner, something obscurely detached. "I wonder what you knew of him. . . ." She seemed to hesitate and to go on, when she did, in a tone growing more and more impersonal. . . . "Did you know him to allow himself . . . I mean to get himself—written about."

Netta's eyes shone brightly. So it *had* come.

"Know him to do that? Why, of course, my dear Lesley. But what of it?" (knowing how significant the matter must inevitably be to that girl). "Isn't it what all men do? Does one trust any man?" (knowing that that girl *had* trusted one man). "Does one, in any case, measure men by paltry standards of that kind? One likes a person or not—irrespective of what he is or does" (knowing that to that young intelligence, that untrained judgment, there could be no compromise at the bidding of Love or anything else).

"You think that?" (meaning "I don't").

And that was all. Lesley walked very deliberately now down the passage and so to her room, leaving Netta speculating, measuring, hoping, at last smiling happily.

Boxrider had an odd experience, the office telephone being the instrument. Merely this, that being called to the receiver, a voice (a feminine voice) put a question—the usual question you might say—a mere “Is that Mr. Boxrider?”

“Yes,” he had said.

And then had come this: “You want—something. Don’t give up.”

“Give up?”

“Hope, Mr. Boxrider.”

“Who is speaking?”

Silence.

“Who is speaking, please?”

Silence.

He couldn’t “fix” that voice. He knew so few women. It wasn’t. . . . No, it was not *hers*. But the message had been intended for him. His name wasn’t a common one. . . .

He went back to his desk and sat there long. Then suddenly he grew ashamed. *He* to sit. . . . Business! There must be business done. Only two days before he had told his partner: “We’ve got to expand. I’m going for more trade.”

“More trade . . . what’s the good?”

Boxrider had looked at him shrewdly. “Oh, there’s an object, if you can see it!”

“I can’t,” shrilly (how shrill Beech had become; his very thoughts, gestures, movements were shrill, over-pitched).

Boxrider had shrugged his shoulders.

“If you think——”

“Think? I won’t think! Think! Don’t I think? How does one stop thinking?”

“Well, it’s merely this, Beech. Business means money, doesn’t it? I’ve something to sell that is worth money—a considerable amount of money. Did I tell you that I booked ‘Tom’s Tea’ yesterday—all their business for five years? And we begin with a contract with the first page of the ‘Daily Story’ every Wednesday for the first of those five years. At last I’m beginning to do big business.”

And that was how he had felt. It was how, in increasing degree, he was feeling to-day. He had to-day a curious over-mastering sense of reaching a climax. He would go out now and do more business. He would force business. Why, he could not say, but that message now mingled oddly with this vast growing intent. And so into a street alive with suggestion, as it seemed to him to-day, he went with a vivid, eager resolve. Business!

Business, and then——

VII

Boxrider knew where he intended to go, and before the vast and imposing marble doorway of an office at the Holborn end of Kingsway he stopped.

Inside, a porter came forward with his first-quality deference. He did not know Boxrider, but he recognized that the man, whoever he was, got that first-quality deference from all public servants.

“Mr. Davey? Yes, sir. Will you come this way?” There was no suggestion that Mr. Davey might refuse to see him. Boxrider was always one of the men who “walk right in.”

Anyhow, Davey seemed to have heard of Boxrider. He rose, a smallish, exquisitely shaven creature in best black vicuna (his tailor had told him that) and a white slip. A “Do it now merchant” was his clerks’ description of him. He worked all day surrounded by filing cabinets and telephones, and looked like the ideal type of the “Treble-your-salary-by-correspondence” school people.

He waved Boxrider to a seat. But the visitor merely nodded. “I’ll save your time,” he said. “Look here! The Government have signed an order to pull down the Minor Crown Colonies Office in Whitehall. There’ll be hoardings up for twelve months. I’ve got all the spaces. There’ll be three sides on view. I’ve allotted two. I’ve got one left. Now, if I’m correctly informed, you’re about to handle the ‘Budd Light Car’ over here.”

“Who told you that?” snapped Davey.

Boxrider shrugged his shoulders. “I’ve just been talking to a man back from America. And in America—one hears things. Well, it’s the best site in London for you. Every man going in and out of the House sees your car and nobody else’s.”

“What do you want?”

Boxrider threw down a scrap of paper.

“There are my figures.”

Davey gave them a glance and looked up.

“Right. Send in your contract.” (“The chap was in the doorway, though,” he said afterwards, “before I’d agreed. That’s the kind of self-confidence he shows always, I believe; but I confess that, as it was my first experience, I was a little taken aback.”)

In the street Boxrider paused and considered. And it was now that an impulse came which made him first look at the watch on his wrist and then signal for a taxi. To the driver he said “Euston.” Yes, it was extraordinary how inexhaustible his energy was this morning. . . . That message? Perhaps. He had had this notion for some days—this idea of attacking the provinces. But the impulse “to do it now” was certainly a thing of this moment. “Northampton,” he said at the booking office. He would be back in four hours.

Arriving in the town of leather he drove off at once, and ten minutes later found himself looking up at a tall office building backed by a huge, red-brick factory, across the whole face of which office stood out in brazen work the legend “Q for Quality in Boots.” We all know those boots, but perhaps we know them better to-day than we did. Boxrider marched in.

“I want to see Sir James.”

The man addressed looked for a moment doubtfully at the caller.

Sir James? Sir James was not to be seen without an infinitude of negotiation.

“Have you—have you an appointment, sir?”

“Certainly not!” answered Boxrider. There was almost a suggestion that some subtle affront must be intended by the suggestion that he had an appointment; and the commissionaire began to find all his reasoning processes breaking up. This kind of person—well, he had never seen a person of this kind before; and, as he confessed to the man who relieved him at dinner time, “I was that flummuxed I let ‘im up to Sir James without thinking more. *Couldn’t* think. Now if ‘e’d said ‘e ‘adn’t an appointment but ‘e *thought* Sir James would see ‘im, I’d ‘ave doubted. But when ‘e stands there, snapping out as if ‘e was the Lord Mayor from the Manshing ‘Ouse, couldn’t condescend to ‘ave appointments an’ little things like that—why ‘e beat me.”

Sir James determined to have something to say to that idiot who had opened the door and pushed in on him that extremely assured young man.

Sir James Bell was elderly and distinctly of the old school. He could be slow and coldly amiable.

“I don’t think I ever had the pleasure,” he murmured, his eye on the card which Boxrider, not the commissionaire, had flung down before him. “Mr.—Mr. Boxrider, and my man evidently misunderstood —brought you——”

“That’s all right, Sir James,” broke in Boxrider, with a laugh. “He did the right thing, as I’m sure you’ll agree when you’ve heard what I’ve got to say.”

Sir James’ brows began to pucker, the corners of his mouth to tighten. “I don’t know, Mr.”—with an

affectation of consulting the card to get the name correctly before continuing—"Boxrider. I don't know that I desire—that is, that I have the time——" A delicately nurtured hand caressed the shaven chin.

"But you've not heard me out, Sir James. What I've to say is this. I've been reading your annual report."

"Well?" sharply, defensively.

Boxrider came closer.

"There was, I observed, a drop in profits—a bad drop—— No, no! hear me out, Sir James. Why was there that drop? Not because your goods are deteriorating. They're not. I wear your boots myself and know they're the best in Europe. But everybody doesn't know that; and the reason everybody doesn't know that is this—that you don't tell 'em."

"We do!" For a moment the proud old man who had lived and worked in that quarter of his town for fifty years and claimed to know his business seemed concerned only to refute a calumny. But there was some note, as of an obscure kind of despair, that could hardly have been missed by his hearer.
"We do. I say we do."

"No, sir. You advertise—yes. That is, you pay money to newspapers and billstickers to allow space to you in which you make certain statements. But they're not statements that anybody reads. 'Q—for Quality Boots.' Yes, that's all right. But it's not new. But what is the good of saying, as I see you were saying last night in your advertisement in a London paper, 'Q Boots are the best on the market;

you have only to compare them with others to be assured of this'? Now does a man buy half a dozen pairs of boots at one time and compare them solemnly? *He buys one pair at a time*; and what you've got to do is to see that the next pair he buys is *yours*."

As usual he had got the ear of his hearer. He always got that at once, however unwilling those people might seem at the outset.

"Now, how are you going to do that? By making him read about you. Well, and how do you make a man read? What would make you read yourself? What you want is to humanize your copy. Be lively, though not with that rotten sprightliness that some people go in for—people who won't spend the necessary money. And above all don't do your advertising from here. Have a London agent. Have," with a quick smile, "have me. Give me a trial. Only a London agent knows the psychology of a London crowd, and it's the London crowd that you want to get at. You in Northampton understand boots better than anybody else; but we in London understand publicity better than anybody else. You've got to be lively with the liveliness the Londoner likes. There are various ways of being lively—the taste changes. Just now the method is to connect your goods with a character. If you find a good character, a really popular figure, and connect him to your boot you'll do business."

"You'd better tell me—"

Well, there was the conquest. But you have to

realize what that man, James Bell, was to appreciate the quality of the victory. Bell, the Conservative; the man of Corporation feasts, dignities, slow sanctions; suspicious of the new and obscure; Bell who had sent away young men for showing an impulse to be what he called “vulgar”; who had declared that “We old houses have a reputation to maintain, not only for quality in the things we sell but for decency in the way we sell them”; Bell who had kept the entire business in his own hands, board of directors though there might be to adjust the policies of the concern; Bell—that Bell known to all his friends as invincible—had surrendered.

We are all familiar to-day with the alphabet infant who is always reminding us that Q is Quality in boots.

That effort of Boxrider’s may now be envisaged as in the nature of the climax—not actually the biggest thing, but the particular success which coincided with a parallel climax in this life of his.

For Bell it was a change of policy and a pretty effective change, as he was ready to admit when, at the next annual meeting, he announced that profits were up for the first time for ten years.

“We have—er—introduced new methods—drastic reforms in our publicity, with what, I think you will agree, gentlemen, are gratifying results——”

Boxrider ever afterwards thought pleasant things about Bell for reasons that Bell would never have been in a position to understand. . . . Bell, yes; but always, first and above all—Kingfords.

Leaving Bell, he went back through the busy narrow town to his station and to London. It was ten minutes past four as he walked out into Euston Square. A summer haze hung over Euston Road, and in the golden mist he walked on through the Bloomsbury Squares and came at last to Holborn. He was nearing his office. And as it had been doing all day his mind was going back to that telephone message.

He had a notion, he discovered, to eye his work upon the Strand hoarding; and so, deliberately, he began to approach.

VIII

Alone in her room Lesley walked restless. There was something misappropriate in taking possession of a bedroom at mid-day for purposes of self-examination; and she was uneasy at once. The sunlight pouring into the room seemed utterly to refuse its sympathy, and she wanted desperately the sympathy of natural things.

Moving about now, what most distressed her was a sense of the collapse of something. This business of Claude Coleton never became a matter of exculpating him. She did not find herself seeking excuses for him. Her love for him had collapsed—that was precisely the word. It had stood and—it did not stand.

And already she was being troubled, haunted by memories. She looked back to that brief time be-

tween her first meeting with him and the hour when she first became filled with that immense thought of his interest in her, when he had first compelled her to the happy excitement of the desired. She had had then, in that brief interval, a momentary leisure, a fleeting detachment, and had judged him to be—what? She could remember an impression of something—a softness, a kind of amorphousness, and certainly a rather expensive egotism—qualities which did not go to the making of a character of the kind which could be relied on to maintain ideal standards.

Considering that picture, she demanded of herself why she need have been affected by it. Conversely to the condition of a mourner who finds himself dry-eyed at the death of a relative and is distressed because he is not distressed, so this girl, standing close to the fact of a relationship with this man, was distressed because she *was* distressed. She wanted to have been able to laugh quietly, easily, happily; and the laugh when it came was hysterical.

She wanted to have killed these doubts with her love, and she had found her love killed by these doubts. Doubts? Not doubts, convictions. He had made, at first, a quiet cheerful admission. Could not he see that he had disturbed not merely a minor conception of him but a major? A pebble had been removed? Yes, but a pebble on which the entire structure of a universe depended.

It may seem curious that Lesley should be so immensely affected by a discovery of this kind. The fact that she had gone in and out of the world among

men, in and out of the schools where, in young passions we may spend ourselves, exhibit ourselves, and learn certain rather grim principles of life, might suggest a preparation in her for anything—certainly for an easy sustaining of minor losses—minor, that is, in terms of the thinking of a woman of the world.

The character of that mentality of hers, however, is less uncommon than may be supposed. Girls of her spiritual intensity, in exercise of some swift eclecticism pick out for notice only something here and there from the myriad impressions crowding in upon them; and the selections are the few fine things they see. Their conceptions of their kind precede their actual impressions: they indulge; they see men through an atmosphere of their own creation. Their ideas are subjective ones, rarely objective.

Lesley had never known detachment; she had created an image of Claude from her inner consciousness of him. And now the idol was swept from its pedestal.

The severity of the shock the more completely destroyed her image of him; and as that fell it left its place vacant for the rising of that first, and until now forgotten, impression of a man indulgent, self-delighting. Yes, her life was in ruins. She had no standards now; any standards she had had she must henceforth inevitably distrust. She would have to begin all over again. And of course any profession of principle made by a man must never be believed.

She was extraordinarily distressed. And she could see no way back to Claude. She could eye him, in-

deed, coldly through her very tears. But presently she began to suspect as a possibility that Claude had been a creation of her own; and that it was her own creation which she had loved rather than the actual Claude. It was not the light in his eyes, the movement of his body, the sway of him as he came towards her, the touch of his hands, or any of those things that went to make up the real man. It was that idealized conception, that figure to which she had looked up, that man significant, as it had seemed to her, of distinction, high purpose, and an exalted art of living—no less than of working—on which she had spent herself.

Well, it was over.

How would Claude like it? She found she did not care. She could imagine that he would be wounded as she would not, once, have believed possible. Still she could not care.

It occurred to her that Netta would be interested—*was* interested. This would mean something to Netta. And then a new thought came: Claude's default from high virtue meant nothing to Netta; such things were irrelevant to Netta. If Netta loved a man she loved in complete despite of discoveries such as she (Lesley) had made.

She found herself wondering, in her own way, whether Netta could be right. If that *was* the way. . . . Was she being absurd? Was the thing called Love of such unsubstantial stuff that at a mere touch it could vanish? Or was it not rather like some splendid living organism, a fine upstanding thing

which yet, by the entry into it of some minute particle of arsenic or a small pellet of lead, falls to the ground dead?

The latter characterization seemed to her to be the more useful. Yet still she examined herself—only to return to herself the same answer. She had loved this man because she had first—what was the phrase?—looked up to him, yielding him what had seemed an appropriate reverence. Love had depended upon veneration—or something akin to veneration. The one was structurally dependent upon the other. Remove the one and the other crashed to the ground—where now it lay in ruins.

Presently she found herself, in a kind of wistfulness, reviewing certain circumstances apparently at first remote enough. Meetings with those other men. Beech. . . . She was ready to be angry with Beech. But her sense of justice ultimately acquitted him. If what he had said was true, and it *was* true, it was well that she should know. His disclosures might appear to her in perspective as a smaller affair than it now appeared, though she did not think it would ever seem less. But if it had been made to her after she had married Coleton—if she had discovered him *then* a mere cynical *poseur*—in what ruins would not her life have appeared to be involved. She must—through tears maybe—but still she must bless Beech!

Her mind, running from Beech, came suddenly upon his partner. She found herself much more ready to be angry, but with an anger the aim of which was much less steady. The want of steadiness

did not, however, excite her inward comment at the moment. Her immediate consciousness was of Boxrider as a suitable target. (She wanted a target. She had something to fire off.) And, after all, if he had not involved her in that transaction of the picture, would Coleton have come to be signified to her in the same degree as he had been—as the protagonist of a fine protest against the vulgarity of advertising? It was that picture, and the fact of her having sold it, which had contributed so much to a situation in which she was made to find her love for a man upon something almost specific. If there had been no picture, Claude would by now have signified to her merely a man of distinction in the world of letters, and he would certainly be quite unsusceptible in her eyes to a charge such as had now destroyed him.

At last she came to this: that the enemy was this thing called Publicity. It had involved the Beeches and the Boxriders on the one hand; it had dragged in the Coletons on the other; finally it had drawn in her herself.

Yes, indubitably the enemy. Looking back she had an overwhelming sense of the menace of the thing, as of something that had lurked in the background of her life, dragon-like, and that had at intervals struck at her, until at last it came out deliberately to destroy.

Boxrider, then, is to be envisaged as the last person whom she wished to see—his work, profession, or whatever she was to call it, being so cardinal a dis-

ability as to shut him for ever out of her presence, even out of her consciousness. If she had banished Coleton, she had blotted out Boxrider from her mind; all of which is rather curious.

Presently, to avoid Netta, she put on her hat and, without calling at the sitting-room door, walked straight out into the street. She wandered then through Battersea Park and at last back across the river and so to Westminster. There was a heavy, warm haze about her and before, and she saw distant shapes in mists and shadows. This blurring of outlines fitted her mood to-day. It suggested avoidances, refusals to be stark; and for some such example and encouragement she found herself seeking. Still she walked on, and realizing at last that she was using the Embankment, she turned up a side street with a thought that if she must find food—as she supposed she must—the Women's Reform Club was near. She had her first moment of objective curiosity regarding herself as she stood for a moment and hesitated at the Club portal. For, after all, there was she—she could peer at herself as at something entirely detached—there was she, going in at this door in order to be surrounded by the very walls which had once, in a first moment of high significance, enclosed her with Claude. Here she had first been made aware of tendencies—towards herself. Here had Claude become the worshipped Claude, the beloved Claude, the welcomed dictator Claude.

And to-day, with the image of Claude rudely broken before her eyes, here, surely, was the best

place for her feet. Was not coming here a thrusting upon herself of pangs that could have been easily spared? Was not she offering herself pregnant memories? Why, even this mere threshold had its memory of a safe conduct to a cab, with a hand—the male hand—grasping tenderly.

And yet still she persisted—*could* persist. It was this potential in herself which impressed her so profoundly as she considered her own present attitude. On the other hand, she was still convinced by the complete downfall of something that had once stood up fine and distinguished before her. Shattered idealism? Well, but the shattering involved a sufficiently tragic sequel. She felt extraordinarily the victim of certain reactions still—reactions, unquestionably, to that downfall of her belief in Claude.

And in the meantime she partook of a modest luncheon, and then wandered out towards the street. Here, turning northwards, she came a moment later into the Strand.

And it was even as she came there and stood looking across the street that, half veiled in the summer haze, the great hoarding rose up before her. Familiar though she was with the fact that it stood where it did, it yet loomed up in front of her to-day with some extraordinary character of surprise. She certainly started at sight of it, as if it had had movement, volition, and had come suddenly upon her. But surprise was not a lonely sensation springing obscurely from her remote consciousness. There was some-

thing else which had its roots there—something dark, inexplicable. . . . Fear.

She dared not explore below that surface of self. And yet—Fear? Of what?—of whom? She had, perhaps, surprising intuitions. Out of that færy mist what visions might rise—visions of strange, dark fates, of shadowy forms which yet moved powerfully, as with the power of life and death. She had an extraordinary and terrifying sense of being involved, drawn under. She stood there the victim of that terror . . . and yet the extraordinarily excited victim. It was no cold terror, no abject terror. She was exalted by a sense of adventure; she found herself, with a thrill, called on to step into an unknown wherein she would “live dangerously.” And while yet she stood waiting, her eyes upon the misted hoarding whereon the colours wove themselves in and out of one another, the vision came to her.

IX

She knew not, and never afterwards knew, really, for how long she stood there in the high shadow of New Lane where it debouches into the Strand. But all the time she stood looking across at that hoarding.

Advertisement. The blatant thing, the vulgar, the thing to destroy which her lost lover had laboured with such a devotion. Now that he grew insignificant, need his principles grow so also? By the laws of

what moral universe was it appointed that if the teacher fell through an insecurity in his moral structure the lesson he had taught fell with him?

There before her, hanging upon that planked frame, were those appeals to the minds of men and women hurrying past and troubled with many cares of life. They had to be abrupt appeals, and vulgar; and yet not necessarily and not always vulgar. Dim to-day in the mist shone the reproduced colours of that master genius. . . . *There* was something—something that challenged. An outrage. . . . That was what they called it—agreed, you might say, to call it. Very nearly her own word . . . and in a further corner, the thing from her own brush. . . .

Advertisement.

And now the vision, as if of the thing against which her heart flung all its forces, stood up suddenly to defend itself. As if an accused set up its justification.

X

She was in the midst of a great traffic. She stood in the centre of a circle of the whole world, London being that centre. Trade—the exchange of the bazaars of India for the looms of Lancashire, the grain of Canada for the coal of South Wales.

And promoting this trade, this exchange, this preservation of the equipoise of a universe, were these men she had despised, these adventurers. Their blatant words were the news of the movement.

Kingford's cocoa. She had known nothing of that commonplace beverage, only its advertisements; and particularly those curious, personal—appallingly personal—advertisements, over which shop-girls and mill-hands giggled. But now this drink went to her head. Though it had not passed her lips she saw visions—strange pictures of remote scenes.

Wide blue skies. Green plantations. Graceful brown forms of women moving before her, their bare, brown arms raised as their fingers pluck, from the bushes, the berry. . . . Impersonal these? But, no, as now she remembered. In the heart of each of them was sex and strange obscure passions; the hidden realities of something individual and immortal. The curtain of the East, hanging between them and her, was, for a moment, lifted, and she saw life in terms of their conceptions.

Then back into the deep, eternal mystery of their race and world—that world where the dimensions even are not as ours—are they received. . . .

White-robed coolies carrying boxes to a ship's side. Each heart of those men mysteriously ambitious, passionate, resourceful to win some inexplicable end. What these men are seen doing is the least part of the fact by which they are signified.

And the ship with its blue-eyed, raddle-faced captain, English (Liverpool, Bootle), and with hopes of home within the month now. And the crew. Dago some of it but British also—Cockneys with their readiness again for old Lime'ouse, little black-eyed Taffies from Cardiff, that engineer from Glasgow,

where they make engineers on the mass-production principle; the Irish cook, though talking like a Dublin Christian and not like a hired funny man. Every one a palpitating reality, not a mere cameo, a living creature with hopes and fears, delicacies and deceits; visions of women and of little rooms and tiny shrines all encompassed in the heart of each. Captain and crew of the cargo steamer—whatever you choose—carrying home berries of cocoa. . . . But her swift and devoted mind did not leave them now. Who but she stood on the bridge beside that blue-eyed skipper when, being brought near some peril, he dodged and ran. She could see those cold stars overhead and that trudging vessel pushing on home. And, in the hold, berries for Kingfords!

And then the men in the docks at Weftport, each with some kind of a reality of home behind him—a wife, a child—and every one different from every one else. It was this extraordinary and overtopping fact of personal individuality which made her, contemplating it, catch her breath.

There were the engine-drivers and guards with the goods; yard workers swinging out these crates from Kingford's wagons in their Cheshire garden city. And finally—or was it finally?—there was that Garden City, Kingford Town.

She had had a prejudice against the Garden City on an artistic scruple. There had seemed to her something about the thing which was contemptuous of the spirit of Place. An ordinary town or village had the slow, casual beauty and reality of moss; its

growth was undirected, it was formed of many different contributions from many different sources, it was coloured by a thousand different minds, lighted by a million thoughts; it was no man's—it was every man's. But a garden city was a single thought; it was the conception of a single mind.

And often she had shrugged a shoulder at garden cities. But now the light of the vision which had brought before her those far eastern fields and that had dived into the hearts of homeward voyaging Englishmen, fell suddenly upon the Garden City. She saw it as it might be perhaps—who knew, for she didn't—as it was. The conception of one mind—yes; but a mind not ignorant of, or indifferent to, the reminders of duty to those whose brains and fingers were making wealth. And about those adventitiously assembled streets and houses of the industrial towns, was there not sometimes an essential ugliness, a veiled indecency, an implicit challenge to the humanity which professed to condemn darkness and dankness, inefficient drainages, subsoils that still sweated, the shutting out of the light of heaven, the crowding of many the better to give space to the few? Squalor, misery, death belonged perhaps even to the seemingly pleasant towns, those slower results of indefatigable, laborious, but slow Time.

Kingford Town, where men could breathe clean air, see a sky untroubled by a pall of earthly vapours, enjoy the beauty of trees and flowers, and, above all, have opportunity to realize themselves: was not Kingford Town, achievement of the genius of a

single mind though it was, something better than many of those older places? Was there not here amidst these little jolly stucco and pebbledash single-fronted houses (many different in detail but all of a small not highly distinguished pattern)—was there not here essentially a nobler perspective, a finer reality than that of these little damp houses of an older time—even those within the shadow of some famous old Gothic?

She watched the life of the place, the men grumbling a little at their conditions (they would be bound to do that, being not extraordinary Englishmen), but going out to their work so pleasantly near at hand; and all those girls coming from those little houses, young romantics all of them, caught already by the enchantment of life. Making Kingfords, packing it, forwarding it. . . .

And now she burst from her Garden City and came to the shops outside. Women of every kind: the well-to-do sort in her furs on Ealing Broadway and Hampstead High Street. . . . “And I want a packet of Kingford’s cocoa”; this to that pale young man behind the counter with his quick assiduous pencil for each item. And that other sort, shawl over head in Angel Lane, Stratford, or in Bermondsey, or in Weftport docks—she also asks for “Kingfords.”

And finally here are these people at home, encompassed by the mystery that is behind the shut door—behind every shut door. She saw them at their

table, drinking that commonplace but not unwholesome liquid, that familiar, homely thing. . . .

She paused. She had, perhaps, with this suddenly born, swift, vivid, all-embracing genius of hers, seen a million faces, dark faces, sun-tanned faces, the love-lighted faces of factory girls, the pale faces of shop-men, and every face was that of some man or woman involved in this one traffic, this thing called Kingfords. To her now it was no mere objective pageant: it had the mystery and beauty and significance of life itself—of the life in which she had her part. She found herself immensely involved with these others.

And Kingfords was but one of many such great traffics—soap, cotton, candles, a million and a million more—made known and glorious by the men and women who maintained them.

Yes, and making these traffics possible, making them increase, aiding their conquests, widening their renown was this thing called Advertising. Kingfords, it had been said, was built up on advertising. So that those dark men with their mysterious passions, those blue-eyed sailors, those laughing factory girls . . . and the others . . . were maintained in their places, afforded some part of the dignity that you associated with a world traffic by—this advertising.

She still stood looking deep into that haze. For the moment the spell of the adventure had made her forget those earlier pangs of that obscure terror. . . . She was being involved . . . her fate was being

woven. Mysteriously, out of those misted colours, as it seemed, her fate was being woven.

She turned with a swift, passionate surmise as the sound of a step caught her ear.

And then she knew. . . . In a flash the mystery hid in these colours was being interpreted.

Boxrider! At her side standing over her. She had never thought of him as a tall man, but now he seemed to tower, his head among the heavens, his eyes brilliant, and their gaze cleaving the mists and shining down into her. And all these colours, caught, as it were, even from the palette of that hoarding, had become pigments, making more radiant the universe through which his voice echoed as he called her. . . .

“Lesley!”

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